

# *State and Society*

*The Emergence and Development of Social  
Hierarchy and Political Centralization*

Edited by

J. Gledhill, B. Bender, M.T. Larsen



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Edited by

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## Foreword

This book is one of a major series of more than 20 volumes resulting from the World Archaeological Congress held in Southampton, England, in September 1986. The series reflects the enormous academic impact of the Congress, which was attended by 850 people from more than 70 countries, and attracted many additional contributors from others who were unable to attend in person.

The *One World Archaeology* series is the result of a determined and highly successful attempt to bring together for the first time not only archaeologists and anthropologists from many different parts of the world, as well as academics from a host of contingent disciplines, but also non-academics from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, who could lend their own expertise to the discussions at the Congress. Many of the latter, accustomed to being treated as the 'subjects' of archaeological and anthropological observation, had never before been admitted as equal participants in the discussion of their own (cultural) past or present, with their own particularly vital contribution to make towards global, cross-cultural understanding.

The Congress therefore really addressed world archaeology in its widest sense. Central to a world archaeological approach is the investigation not only of how people lived in the past but also of how, and why, changes took place resulting in the forms of society and culture which exist today. Contrary to popular belief, and the archaeology of some 20 years ago, world archaeology is much more than the mere recording of specific historical events, embracing as it does the study of social and cultural change in its entirety. All the books in the *One World Archaeology* series are the result of meetings and discussions which took place within a context that encouraged a feeling of self-criticism and humility in the participants about their own interpretations and concepts of the past. Many participants experienced a new self-awareness, as well as a degree of awe about past and present human endeavours, all of which is reflected in this unique series.

The Congress was organized around major themes. Several of these themes were based on the discussion of full-length papers which had been circulated some months previously to all who had indicated a special interest in them. Other sessions, including some dealing with areas of specialization defined by period or geographical region, were based on oral addresses, or a combination of precirculated papers and lectures. In all cases, the entire sessions were recorded on cassette, and all contributors were presented with the recordings of the discussion of their papers. A major part of the thinking behind the Congress was that a meeting of many hundreds of participants that



did not leave behind a published record of its academic discussions would be little more than an exercise in tourism.

Thus, from the very beginning of the detailed planning for the World Archaeological Congress in 1982, the intention was to produce post-Congress books containing a selection only of the contributions, revised in the light of discussions during the sessions themselves as well as during subsequent consultations with the academic editors appointed for each book. From the outset, contributors to the Congress knew that if their papers were selected for publication, they would have only a few months to revise them according to editorial specifications, and that they would become authors in an important academic volume scheduled to appear within a reasonable period following the Southampton meeting.

The publication of the series reflects the intense planning which took place before the Congress. Not only were all contributors aware of the subsequent production schedules, but also session organizers were already planning their books before and during the Congress. The editors were entitled to commission additional chapters for their books when they felt that there were significant gaps in the coverage of a topic during the Congress, or where discussion at the Congress indicated a need for additional contributions.

One of the main themes of the Congress was devoted to 'Comparative Studies in the Development of Complex Societies'. The theme was based on discussion of precirculated full-length papers, covering three and a half days, and was under the overall control of Dr Tim Champion, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, and Dr Michael Rowlands, Reader in the Department of Anthropology, University College London. The choice of this topic for a major theme arose from a desire to explore, from a world-wide and interdisciplinary perspective, the assumptions that are embodied in the common use by archaeologists and others of concepts such as 'complex societies', a supposed stage in social development often also assumed to be marked by the invention and wide usage of literacy.

This awareness of the dangers of assuming that archaeological terminology is a precise language consisting of terms which have a single accepted meaning, with well-authenticated qualitative connotations, derived, at least in part, from lessons learnt from the last major interdisciplinary consideration of urbanization in 1970 (Ucko *et al.* 1972). At that time discussion led Stuart Piggott (in Ucko *et al.* 1972, pp. 948–9) to stress

that we must avoid semantic confusion when we use certain words and names for things. We use the word 'town' or 'city', and in the classical world this was *polis* or *urbs*, and what we have to consider is whether we are falling into that well-known trap of confusing names with actual things, and while using the name embodying modern concepts, we forget that these concepts were not those of literate antiquity, and therefore by reasonable assumption not of non-literate antiquity. Consider for instance that Latin use of *urbs* in relation to the Celtic population of barbarian Europe. What did a Latin writer really mean when he called a hill-fort, *urbs*, as indeed on occasion they did?

It did not mean it was like Rome, although he used the same word for the city, the Imperial City, as he would for this barbarian earthwork enclosure, the functions of which, or the functions of any hill-fort, we very imperfectly understand. Let us avoid the ancient belief in the magic power of words, which can make us turn names into real things, and so fulfil a primitive conviction that when you have given a thing a name you have a command over it, like knowing someone's secret name. It is possible to persuade oneself that having named a concept, therefore, it actually exists and can be dealt with accordingly.

The overall theme therefore took as its starting point the assumption that the concept of social complexity needed to be re-examined and probably refined. A narrow parochial approach to the past, which simply assumes a European development to urbanization and literacy as the valid criterion for defining a complex society, totally ignores the complexity of non-literate civilizations and cultures such as the Inca of Peru or that of Benin in Nigeria. However, a world archaeological approach to a concept such as that of social complexity focuses attention on precisely those features which archaeologists all too often take for granted.

Discussions during the Congress were grouped around five main headings and have led to the publication of three books. The first subtheme, organized by Barbara Bender, Department of Anthropology, University College London, was concerned with 'The Development of Complexity'; the second, under the control of Daniel Miller, also of the Department of Anthropology, University College London, and Christopher Tilley of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, was on 'Modes of Domination', and the third, organized by Michael Rowlands, was on 'European Expansion and the Archaeology of Capitalism'. Contributions from these three subthemes, which were discussed on two different days, form the book *Domination and resistance*, edited by D. Miller, M. Rowlands, and C. Tilley. The fourth subtheme on 'Centre/Periphery Relations' which was discussed for one day is edited by its organizer, Timothy Champion, under the title *Centre and periphery*. More than a day was devoted to the fifth subtheme, 'State and Society; the Emergence, Development and Transformation of Forms of Social Hierarchy, Class Relations and Political Centralization' which has been edited by its organizers to create this volume.

The approach adopted within the overall theme of 'Comparative Studies in the Development of Complex Societies' was based on a consideration of the *processes* involved in the creation and establishment of the elements of social organization, and social activities, which archaeologists and others commonly claim to be the visible end-results of the activities of complex societies. In a comparative context, attention is focused on the reasons why, and mechanisms by which, the non-literate civilizations of, for example, the Inca of Peru, built and maintained some 23 000 km of 'roads' and what their function was within the sociopolitical state system of some 6–12 million peoples with diverse backgrounds and identities who lived in environmental conditions as different as the desert and the High Andes. Within the nonliterate Inca state, political

control of heterogeneous social groups was achieved by an hierarchical system of regional administrative centres with an inevitable complexity of relations existing between centres and the hinterland. Given this complexity, which exists in the absence of literacy in the Inca state, the traditional focus of the study of complex societies on the better-known literate 'civilizations' of the Old World appears odd and misguided.

If the traditional assumptions about 'complexity' can thus be discarded, so too can the equally traditional, and virtually exclusive, emphasis on development and evolution. The conventional concern with determining where and when 'state' and 'class' originated gives way to more fundamental questions about the processes of long-term social change and the very complex relationships which exist between social and cultural identity and perception, order, and development.

Key concepts in such an approach, essential to our understanding of the relevant social processes, are those of 'authority' and 'power'. Contributors to the theme on 'Comparative Studies of the Development of Complex Societies' examined both concepts in an attempt to disentangle any Eurocentric assumptions embedded in the terms themselves, and also to describe precisely the forms which power and authority may take in other societies, both today and in the past.

Inherent in all of the contributions is the assumption that social relations have never been any more equal and symmetrical in societies in the past than they are in contemporary societies. Many of the perspectives adopted in these books explore the details of these asymmetrical relations, considering not only the variety of forms that have been adopted over different times and in different parts of the world, but also the different mechanisms which have been employed to bolster and reinforce such inequalities. With such inequalities in the distribution of power, and in access to knowledge, come equally varied forms of control over symbolism, ritual, religious cults, and even literacy.

A particular focus of interest therefore lies in the detailed exploration of the different forms and functions of literacy in different societies, an exploration that clearly reveals that these were in no way uniform and that literacy, in itself, cannot be used as a clear marker of social qualitative development (see *Who needs the past?*, edited by R. Layton) —to be able to read and write is not, in itself, to be a member of a qualitatively complex society.

Another form of inherent asymmetry in human societies derives from centre-periphery relations. The presence at the Congress of so many participants from the so-called Third and Fourth Worlds made it possible to examine in detail these relations in a very wide variety of forms, in particular those frequently glossed over in the archaeological literature under rubrics such as 'civilized'/'barbarian', 'urban'/'non-urban', sedentary/nomadic, and agriculturalist/pastoralist.

In focusing on the nature of the varying relationships that can develop between centre and periphery, one is led inevitably to detailed questions about imperialism, colonialism, and acculturation. In part these forms of relationships are a matter of ideology (of 'empire', of 'nation' and of ethnic groups), but it is the mechanisms of expansion, incorporation and maintenance which are clearly vital to our understanding of the past and present, and which are examined by several contributors.

The main themes in *State and society* have been discussed in detail in its editorial introduction. My aim in what follows is to examine a few of the points which have struck me as being of particular note or fascination.

In this book John Gledhill, Barbara Bender, Mogens Larsen, and their contributors set out to examine the nature of social hierarchies and political centralization in a specially chosen set of examples. Their material embraces what would traditionally be called 'ranked' societies (or chiefdoms), ancient 'civilizations', European colonial states and a modern national state from the Third World. In all these cases it is clear that without the sophisticated understanding and use of terminology and concepts deriving primarily from sociology and social anthropology—dealing not only with kinship and politics but with social stratification in general—archaeologists must inevitably be guilty of the most gross oversimplifications in their treatment of other (past) societies.

It is not surprising that *State and society* should be intimately linked in its subject matter and treatment to the two other books in the series deriving from the same thematic part of the Congress, *Domination and resistance* and *Centre and periphery*. Indeed several of the discussions in *State and society* centre on the way that the stability of the state depends on the domination of the periphery. A particularly fascinating archaeological example of the need for sophistication in the analysis of centre-periphery relations concerns the development of the Scottish state and the relative importance of the Vikings, an investigation of social process echoing much of the discussion of the earlier Pictish state and the rôle (or lack of rôle) of Roman intervention in it.

More surprising perhaps is the linkage between *State and society* and *Archaeological approaches to cultural identity*, edited by Stephen Shennan, for several contributions in *State and society* make very clear the way that the ascription of an ethnic identity (whether defined by language, physiognomy, or attributed history) to a particular group of people within the state and society has, in itself, been a major mechanism of political control. Realization of the essentially constructed, and sometimes changing, nature of ethnic identity stresses the basically subjective nature and basis of many of the hierarchical inequalities which characterize the state and the other so-called 'complex societies'. Once a social group has been labelled so, it can be enslaved, exploited for tribute, or even removed by genocide.

None of these preoccupations would be capable of analysis without the archaeological evidence of change (and see *What's new?*, edited by S. van der Leeuw & R. Torrence) and it is this quality of time depth in the changing patterns of the emergence and development of potential hierarchies which is the central focus of this book.

*State and society* is not only about social and political control in the past. In a biting reminder of the relevance today of all the processes under investigation, the book ends with a demonstration of how, in Mexico, control of the educative system itself may act as a determining factor with respect to power and authority by limiting and controlling access to information and, thereby, to status (and see *The excluded past*, edited by P. Stone & R. MacKenzie).

*State and society* is inevitably written in language which endeavours to capture all the intricacies of complex social situations. It is enormously revealing about the underlying reasons and mechanisms of state control and state manipulations. It also demonstrates the breadth of concern of modern archaeology and the essentially interdisciplinary nature of archaeological, sociological, and anthropological investigation and interpretation. *State and society* epitomizes the indivisible nature of past and present and reveals that it is only through charting the changes within a society's political structure that there can be any hope of unravelling all the complex strands which represent a social system at any particular moment,

P.J.Ucko  
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### Reference

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# *Contents*

## *page*

<i>List of contributors</i>	v
<i>Foreword</i>	vii
P.J.Ucko	
<i>Preface</i>	xx
<i>Introduction: the comparative analysis of social and political transitions</i>	1
John Gledhill	
Social evolution and world-historical time	2
The pitfalls of supra-historical definitions	4
Chiefdom to state: gradual and quantitative transition or non-event?	10
State and class	14
Europe and its 'others'	18
Archaeological perspectives on state formation	21
References	26
RANKED SOCIETIES AND THE TRANSITION OF STATEHOOD	
1 <i>Small fish in a big sea: geographical dispersion and sociopolitical centralization in the Marshall Islands</i>	31
Laurence Marshall Carucci	
Conclusion	38
Acknowledgements	39
References	39
2 <i>Evolution, sequential hierarchy, and areal integration: the case of traditional Samoan society</i>	41
Thomas Bargatzky	

Introduction	41
Simultaneous hierarchy and sequential hierarchy	41
The occasional ceremonial hierarchy of Safata	42
Ramifying descent groups in Samoa	46
Safata: an early state?	48
Discussion	49
Acknowledgements	51
Note	51
References	51
3 <i>The Hawaiian transformation of Ancestral Polynesian Society: conceptualizing chiefly states</i>	55
Matthew Spriggs	
Introduction	55
The Hawaiian cultural sequence	56
Interpretations of the Hawaiian sequence	62
A revised Hawaiian model	65
Conclusions	68
Acknowledgements	69
References	69
THE DYNAMICS OF STATE FORMATION: FORMATION PROCESSES, CUMULATIVE AND UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT, DEVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE	
4 <i>State formation and uneven development</i>	75
Christine Ward GaileyThomas C.Patterson	
Tribute-based states	77
The communal mode of production	78
The Germanic mode of production	79
The lineage mode of production	80
Discussion	83
Acknowledgements	84

Notes	84
References	85
5 <i>Subsistence, social control of resources and the development of complex society in the Valley of Mexico</i>	89
Brigitte Boehm de Lameiras	
The primitive ancestors (6000?–1500 BC)	90
The first agricultural villages (1500–600 BC)	91
The development of cities (600 BC–AD 300)	92
The rise of an imperial state: Teotihuacan (c. AD 200–700)	93
The Toltec expansion (AD 700–1100)	94
A new reconcentration of efforts (AD 1100–1500)	95
Some conclusions	96
Notes	97
References	98
6 <i>Hierarchization in Maya segmentary states</i>	101
John W. Fox	
Economics and ethnohistory	101
Chontal migration from ethnohistory	102
Segmentary lineage organization	102
Proxemics of segmentary lineage organization	104
Successive tripartite tiers	106
Genealogy and geography	106
Control of provinces and fragmentation	107
References	108
7 <i>A cycle of development and decline in the early phases of civilization in Palestine: an analysis of the Intermediate Bronze Period (2200–2000 BC)</i>	111
Talia Shay	
Introduction	111
Theoretical background: definition of social change	111
The hypothetical explanations of the transition from Early to Intermediate Bronze	112



	Summary	116
	Acknowledgement	116
	References	116
8	<i>Emerging towns in Benin and Ishan (Nigeria) AD 500–1500</i> P.J.Darling	119
	References	132
9	<i>Control of resources in the medieval period</i> C.G.Harfield	135
	The need for a broader context	135
	Lordship sites and the control of economic resources	138
	References	143
10	<i>Copper production and eastern Mediterranean trade: the rise of complex society on Cyprus</i> A.Bernard Knapp	147
	Introduction	147
	Archaeological background	149
	Economic aspects: production, transportation, and exchange	151
	Ideology and social organization	154
	Copper, cosmopolitanism, and political power	157
	Conclusions	159
	Abbreviations	160
	References	161
	THE RÔLE OF WRITING AND LITERACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL POWER	
11	<i>Introduction: literacy and social complexity</i> Mogens Trolle Larsen	169
	Interpretations: literacy and complexity	171
	Mesopotamian writing	174
	The logic of writing: Uruk and Peru	179
	Conclusion	183
	Acknowledgement	184

References	184
12 <i>Literacy, social organization, and the archaeological record: the case of early Egypt</i>	187
John Baines	
Introduction	187
The context of writing	188
Early Egyptian writing	189
The 3rd-4th dynasties: development and its control	193
Extension and loosening of the system	197
Discussion	198
Conclusion	202
Acknowledgements	203
References	203
13 <i>Power and authority in Early Historic Scotland: Pictish symbol stones and other documents</i>	209
Stephen T.Driscoll	
Historical synopsis	209
Pictish state formation: administration and discourse	212
Pictish symbol stones and symbolic discourse	216
Monumental symbols	221
Acknowledgements	226
References	226
14 <i>Literacy and power: the introduction and use of writing in Early Historic Scotland</i>	231
Margaret R.Nieke	
Acknowledgements	243
References	243
15 <i>Inventions of writing</i>	247
Michael Harbsmeier	
Technology and magic	247
Knowledge and power	250

Recapitulations	253
Acknowledgements	266
Notes	267
References	268

## EUROPEAN COLONIALISM, THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIGENOUS STATE FORMS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN NATIONAL STATES

16	<i>Patrimonialism, involution, and the agrarian question in Java: a Weberian analysis of class relations and servile labour</i>	273
	J.I.(Hans) Bakker	
	Introduction	273
	Classic Indic states	274
	Weber's typology	275
	Alternative models	275
	Servile labour	281
	Peripheralization?	284
	World economy and patrimonialism	286
	Japan and Java	287
	Conclusion	288
	Acknowledgements	289
	Notes	289
	References	291
17	<i>Legacies of empire: political centralization and class formation in the Hispanic-American world</i>	297
	John Gledhill	
	The Spanish conquest as a disjunction in New World history	297
	Class, state, and conquered in the Americas	301
	Views from below: an example from central Mexico	307
	Resistance to capitalism and to centralization	310
	Acknowledgements	312

References	312
18 <i>The centralization of education in Mexico: subordination and autonomy</i> Humberto González Chávez	315
The unit of analysis	318
The municipality and the centralization of education	318
The scope and implications of the centralization of education	324
Education and local social change	330
Conclusions	333
Note	335
References	335
<i>Index</i>	339

## *Preface*

The chapters of this book cover a wide range of regions and historical periods. They embody a number of distinct theoretical perspectives. The authors include anthropologists and historians as well as archaeologists. Yet none of these differences of interest or viewpoint, nor that of nationality, proved any barrier to communication and a genuine flow of ideas, information, and constructive discussion within the extraordinarily positive ambience created by the World Archaeological Congress. Disagreement is not, in any case, something to be deprecated in an international conference. A meeting of this type could scarcely be judged a success if it did not reflect the significant divergence of view which characterizes work in such a central problem area for all the social and historical sciences. It is imperative that such differences be discussed openly, since they reflect the differing practical political as well as intellectual concerns of participants from different parts of the world. It was a tremendous achievement to assemble a genuinely representative group of the world's archaeologists in Southampton, together with representatives of the living heirs to some of the 'other cultures' which have been the 'objects' of archaeological research. But the most signal achievement of all was the way the Congress provided an atmosphere in which people were willing to speak their minds, in the confidence that others wanted to listen.

From the outset, we were determined that our Congress meeting should include not only anthropologists and ethnohistorians working on material which would be seen as immediately 'relevant' to archaeology's traditional areas of research, but social scientists and historians working on more recent historical and contemporary problems. Given the growing interest in historical archaeology, and the extent to which professional archaeologists today are undertaking ethnographic and historical research as an integral part of their investigative strategies, trends which were well exemplified at the Congress, it would be a mistake to place too much emphasis on 'professional' divisions. Nor was it our intention to use a multidisciplinary framework to open archaeologists' eyes to conceptual or theoretical advances made by their colleagues in cognate fields, let alone to dump a pile of appropriate analogies on their laps for consideration in future work on their own material: on the contrary, discussion during the Congress, and this book itself, highlight the problems inherent in using ethnohistorical and ethnographic analogies in research on distant time ranges. But it

does so in the context of an argument for a synthesis of a different kind, a synthesis which is outlined in the Introduction.

The arrangement of the material in the volume may suggest an evolutionary sequence: the first section deals with societies which would fall under the general rubrics of 'chiefdoms' or ranked societies, culminating with a discussion of the Hawaiian case, the second includes discussions of some of the classic nuclear areas of ancient civilizations, the third is concerned with writing and literacy, and the fourth and final section with two European colonial states and a modern process of national state formation. But the project enshrined in the book is not really an evolutionist one, indeed the Introduction begins by discussing the limitations of an evolutionist perspective. Instead we hope that this book demonstrates the value of our collective commitment to the school of thought which contends that archaeological theorizing cannot be, nor should seek to become, autonomous from the endeavours of the other social and historical sciences.

Finally, the editors would like to express their gratitude to Paul Crake and Caroline Jones for their hard work and unfailing patience in resolving the many minor and not-so-minor problems which inevitably arose in assembling a group of participants from the four quarters of the globe. We thank all the participants who attended the symposium on 'Comparative Studies in the Development of Complex Societies' for their contributions to the discussions, from which all the papers assembled in this book have benefited greatly. And last, but certainly not least, we thank Peter Ucko, without whose vision and drive none of this would have been possible.

John Gledhill  
Barbara Bender  
Mogens Trolle Larsen



# *Introduction: the comparative analysis of social and political transitions*

JOHN GLEDHILL

Archaeology is one of a series of disciplines which addresses the universal history of humankind. Crucial phases of that history are only directly accessible through archaeology. Others, including comparatively recent ones, can and should be illuminated through the complementary use of archaeological techniques and other research methodologies. Archaeology has considerable potential for giving us fresh and sometimes corrective insights into problems treated by ethnographers or historians, as several contributions to this book, and to others in the *One world archaeology* series, so amply demonstrate. But what is at issue is not simply the empirical foundations of analysis: the kinds of theories we produce about the past and the 'human condition' (in our particular national and historical settings) are manifestly influenced by our understanding of the present and *vice versa*. If our understanding of both the past and the present is based on a common armature of conceptualizations, then it is imperative that we break down barriers of empirical specialization which inhibit the deepest possible critical reflection on fundamental concepts.

The analysis of 'social complexity' and 'state formation' poses these problems in an acute form. 'The state' may be defined in a variety of ways, but it has the appearance of being a universal sort of concept. We can and do distinguish 'ancient' states from 'modern' ones, and make much finer typological distinctions, but we cling to the notion that there is some universal phenomenon to be subdivided even as we do so. Yet many theorists have had difficulty in deciding whether or not particular prehistoric (or ethnographic) cases should be classified as states or not, and in determining the point at which the transition to statehood is consummated. (For others, as we will see later on, this is not a truly meaningful issue.) At the other end of the historical spectrum, though in some contexts not very far separated in historical time from the period when the first difficulty arises, we have the equally problematic diagnosis of the nature of 'modernity'. The modern state looks a very different animal when it is viewed from the perspective of, say, Africa or Latin America rather than that of the West. Even in the West itself, of course, the nature and rôle of the state is a hotly debated issue, along with the nature of nationalism and the significance of ethnicity, the relationships between state and class power, and the appropriate conceptualization of class itself in late capitalist society. In many regions of the world, archaeologists find themselves strategically located with respect to the modern processes of state and nationbuilding,



since their work is the principal basis for reconstructing a 'past' underpinning the synthesis of national identities.

Nevertheless, as these introductory remarks seek to demonstrate, no truly universal grasp of categories such as 'the state', 'civilization', 'class', and 'ethnicity' is possible without considering the diversity of the forms of human social and political relationships, and, we might add, their cultural dimension, in terms of the entire history of humanity, both in space and in time. The later periods in the evolution of ancient civilizations, the new historical forms produced by the expansion of old centres of civilization and the reactions of populations on their peripheries, the development of regions which were 'marginal' to the great world civilizations, and the transformations wrought by the collision between the European and non-European worlds, are all as crucial to archaeological theorizing as the classic problematic of the 'origins' of the so-called pristine states. But their importance may not lie in their exemplifying essentially the *same* processes or producing a *common* result—'the state'. Similarly, a uniform notion of the 'modern' state may be unhelpful either for understanding current transformations of human realities or for clarifying the distinctiveness of past historical experiences at the social and cultural levels. The search for the state in prehistory, then, is seen in this book as a process which is inextricably linked in fundamental conceptual terms with a larger enterprise, which places the whole of human history on a single scientific agenda, albeit one which is implemented through a variety of research strategies, methodologies, and data sources.

### **Social evolution and world-historical time**

The 19th century evolutionist procedure of arranging contemporary living societies on a pseudo-chronological developmental scale in terms of some definition of their relative 'complexity' may seem such an evidently dubious undertaking as to require no further comment, though it is worth noting that this sort of evolutionism is not an entirely dead letter in world archaeology. But many anthropologists find an evolutionist notion of complexity repugnant for reasons other than its neglect of the historical nature of the so-called 'primitive societies' and the relationships which frequently obtain between their historically developed social configurations and interaction with expansionary systems of civilization, including, of course, European colonialism.

Some reject the merest trace of a 'progressivist' notion of social 'development' as an affront to the equivalence of all individual cultural rationalities. This is not a trivial matter. At the heart of occidental culture lies a commitment to rationalism as a value, the rupture between *Mythos* and *Logos*, whose very nature inscribes the mark of a transcended stage of a universal human history on the 'primitive'. Though the speculative history of 19th century evolutionism is abandoned, world history may remain an evolutionary tale of a teleological kind in a more implicit way: the unfolding of humanity's powers of Reason has its end point in Western 'modernity', built on the cumulative achievements of a particular line of cultural development, while the rest of humanity is ranked in accordance with its approximation to the base-lines of attainment thereby identified. This style of thought is far from being dead. To adopt

any sort of developmentalist perspective on the universal history of humankind is truly a perilous undertaking. And yet some definitions of social complexity appear more innocuous and defensibly 'objective'. The demographic and territorial scale of the 'society' which can be integrated within a single 'political community' by particular types of institutional arrangements or technologies of power appears to be a measurable and significant index of 'developments' in world-historical time. Structural differentiation, functional specialization of governmental institutions, etc., criteria which have figured prominently in the systems-theoretic paradigm in archaeology, also seem to be neutral modes of differentiating social types, by virtue of their very abstraction from the human sociocultural realities they encapsulate.

But some contemporary theorists are prepared to be more concrete. The sociologist Michael Mann, for example, has recently argued that societies from different historical epochs can, and should, be differentiated in terms of their infrastructures of collective and distributive power (Mann 1986). World history is marked by a series of 'inventions'—economic, military, ideological, and political—which create significant discontinuities or jumps in the power capacity of social and civilizational systems. Once one of these jumps has been made in a particular arena of civilizational interaction, certain power resources which were at the leading edge of earlier developments are inevitably superseded. This view seems to imply that differential development is predominantly a function of the relative segregation of such arenas until what Mann sees as the final global triumph of occidental civilization. Since, the effects of relative segregation aside, 'history develops', comparison between societies in different 'world-historical epochs' is largely meaningless and valueless:

What is the sense in calling the Inca Empire (located at about 2000 BC in the world-historical list of inventions given above) and the Spanish Empire (located in the last phase of the list) by the same term of 'traditional aristocratic empires'?...It took only 160 Spaniards and their power infrastructures to destroy the Inca Empire totally. (Mann 1986, p. 525)

Mann is correct in arguing that some notion of cumulative development in world-historical time is essential. To say that human history simply embodies 'change' and 'variation' may be normatively neutral and free from biases of ethnocentricity. But to ignore the way that the history of much of humanity embodies secular processes of cumulative transformation, creating qualitatively different social as well as cultural worlds, is to ignore the irreversible quality and extensive impact on neighbouring populations of certain types of sociocultural transformation, as well as the profound (and sometimes cataclysmic) implications for the life experience of human beings which stem from them. It is also another way in which non-Western peoples are denied their history, even if it brings into focus some features of that history which seem less attractive to modern eyes, and were clearly experienced by some segments of the contemporary population as negative developments. What normative construction one puts on world-historical processes of 'development' is a quite separate issue: acknowledgement of the objectivity of world-historical development is perfectly compatible with a critique

of a particular sociocultural product of that process, such as capitalism or occidental civilization, or a critique of civilization itself.

But there are some residual dangers here, from which Mann himself has not fully escaped. He rightly castigates 'comparative historical sociology' for tending to represent the non-European and ancient worlds of civilization as static or cyclical social formations. Yet it was the occidental world's obsession with its uniqueness and historical density which led to the subsumption of world history under the classical sociological dichotomies such as 'tradition' and 'modernity', *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, mechanical and organic solidarity. Though Mann is conscious of the teleology implicit in the way his historical narrative method traces a unique line development from Sumer to north-west Europe, he is less sensitive to the limitations of 'the Triumph of the West'. His choice of the Andean case to make his point is somewhat ironic, since it provides a particularly striking demonstration of the fact that conquest of political superstructures is not equivalent to the simple replacement of one world-historical 'social dynamic' by another, or the total suppression of alternative cultural life worlds (Portugal Mollinedo 1988, Gledhill, Ch. 17, this volume). Even the most potent power infrastructure thus far encountered in human history has failed to reshape the world according to its own will and image.

### **The pitfalls of supra-historical definitions**

The well-entrenched problematic of 'the origins of the state' readily bespeaks its real nature. 'The state' is posited as a universal, whose definition, whilst abstract and generalizing in appearance, often rests on an occidental vision of governmental power applied to a territorial political unit (often also identified with a 'society' based on a shared normative framework). Within the occidental tradition of the post-medieval period, there emerged, of course, a competing set of models of the nature of the state (and its relationship to 'civil society'), models which are firmly embedded in distinct political philosophical traditions which continue to have saliency in modern life. These differing understandings of the nature of the modern state have been faithfully reflected in the debates among evolutionist anthropologists and archaeologists on state origins.

One type of thesis, associated with classical Marxism, locates the origin of the state in social transformation: centralized political power emerges to protect and institutionalize an order of 'socio-economic stratification' already present in 'civil society'. Though the classical liberal theorists took a 'functional' rather than a coercive-exploitative view of the state, as something constituted consensually to guarantee social order, life, and property, they, as much as their critics, also postulated socio-economic differentiation in a preexisting, preconstituted, civil society as the basis for state formation. Both, in their different ways, also emphasize the conflictive or *potentially* conflictive nature of civil society, differing only in the extent to which they see the resolution of conflict through the institution of the state in terms of coercive imposition or relatively benign functionalist 'integration'. The basic conceptualizations underlying these competing philosophical traditions must, of course, be related to the historical context in which they emerged: whilst it may be

correct in a sense to say, as most general discussions of state formation seem to do, that the origins of the 'conflict' versus 'integration' debate go back to Plato and Aristotle (who lived, we might note, in societies marked by 'class struggle' between rich and poor citizens), the more modern embodiments of these theses in European intellectual culture are more closely related to the two great moments of 'transition' in European society, the political crisis of absolutist monarchic government and the social crisis associated with the rise of capitalism (Wolf 1982, pp. 7-9). It is this which underpins the underlying unity between them.

We have already noted a third approach which has attracted the attention of a number of archaeologists, and has roots in the 19th century, in the work of Spencer in particular. It is concerned with the abstract concepts of 'hierarchy' and 'complexity', albeit in forms which are arguably occidental rather than universal. 'The state' can be seen in terms of the imposition of a new hierarchical level of governmental or regulatory organization on to previously autonomous local units, integrating them into a larger organization in which they lose some of their previous functions to the higher level (and new control functions may be introduced). This type of approach may focus on strictly political integration, or be more abstractly and holistically represented in terms of information or energy flows at the societal level. Some find such approaches preferable from the archaeological point of view, because they identify criteria which are archaeologically observable (Wright & Johnson 1975, Jones & Kautz 1981). The adoption of an 'organizational and realist' definition of the state (Skocpol 1979) has further significant theoretical implications for our view of the relationship between state and social (class) power which will be discussed below. But it can also give rise to another variant of the 'functional' view of the state, a 'functional-managerial' model which may be just as economic as, though not strictly identical to, the classical liberal thesis. As Brumfiel (1983) has pointed out, if the state is so wonderfully adaptive an organization, its lack of historical ubiquity constitutes something of a problem. This type of objection entails another: in order to explain the appearance of the more hierarchic organization, it remains necessary to determine the structure of social power underlying it. Any attempt to transform 'the state' into a purely formal, organizational, category is doomed to inadequacy. Indeed, *this* form of pseudo-universalism may be the most dangerous, in that its assumptions about the content of social power in different historical epochs are often more deeply sedimented and less prone to critical inspection.

Whatever their definition of the state, contemporary theorists for the most part continue to see the problem of 'state origins' as the key to a general, transhistorical understanding of the nature of power and 'social inequality'. Take, for example, the exemplary statement with which Ronald Cohen begins his introduction to a collection which he co-edited with Ellman Service:

The question of how states were formed involves anthropology in problems of social evolution and ultimately in fundamental issues of moral and political philosophy. In evolutionary terms, it forces us to ask what qualities inherent in the human condition propel societies towards more complex, more inclusive, more differentiated systems of social organization.... As a

sociopolitical system, the state permits greater inequality within its population than any known earlier form of association. Why do people give up, or why are they forced to give up, so much local and individual autonomy to become parts of, and subordinate to, despotic, sometimes quite cruel forms of government?... From these empirical issues, it is but a small step to more philosophical ones concerning the nature of power, the nature of good government, and the problem of justice in human affairs (Cohen 1978, p. 1).

Archaeologists are as entitled to make contributions to political philosophy as anyone else should they wish to do so, but it is important not to begin unwittingly with a false problematic. Universalizing definitions of ‘the state’ are in danger of representing ‘state formation’ as a transition to a political organization characterized by forms of central ‘governmental control over ‘society’ which are quite inappropriate to early states.

Even in the early ‘empires’ of the Old and New Worlds, direct territorial control by the political centre was very limited. In [Chapter 6](#) in this volume, Fox argues that a ‘segmentary lineage’ model, and the derived notion of a ‘segmentary state’, provide a better understanding of the fissiparous political dynamics of the Postclassic Maya as revealed ethnohistorically and archaeologically than ‘centralized bureaucratic state’ and ‘empire’ models transposed from the literature on the Highlands, whose intensive agriculture created a potential for centralization which could not be replicated in the Lowlands. Some problems with applying the notion of a ‘segmentary state’ as derived from the Africanist anthropological literature to Hindu-Buddhist societies are discussed by Bakker in [Chapter 16](#), but Fox’s chapter provides an exemplary demonstration of the fact that persistent structures of social hierarchy may not be accompanied by the consolidation of extensive units of political administration. However, though a contrast can clearly be made between the Maya states and the Highland empires, we should also question what we might mean by ‘centralized bureaucratic’ systems in the latter case, given the fact that ‘indirect rule’ seems to have been the basis for the integration of these larger political units, with only incipient ‘bureaucratizing’ tendencies in evidence (Gledhill 1988).

Taking their lead ultimately from Weber, a number of theorists have emphasized the vast gulf in effectiveness which exists between ‘modern’ bureaucracy of the type associated with European national states and that which existed elsewhere (Moulder 1977, Skocpol 1979, Hall 1985). These arguments qualify the degree of central power attained by even the most apparently ‘despotic’ of pre-capitalist imperial state regimes. But since such regimes represented millenniums of development in their regional civilizational settings, there are dangers in focusing exclusively on this type of comparison between the Western and ‘non-Western’. The type of concepts such a comparison generates, such as Hall’s ‘capstone state’ model for imperial China, do not necessarily advance explanation of how and why some ancient states were more effectively centralized than others, as they clearly were. (See Gailey & Patterson, Ch. 4, this volume, on various additional distinctions which might be made in this context.) ‘Bureaucratization’, even in its ancient forms, is a significant *development*, even if the

societies in which it occurs undergo cycles of decentralization subsequently, and different civilizations of similar degrees of cultural complexity can be contrasted on the axis of political centralization. And at the other pole of the comparison, as González Chávez's analysis in [Chapter 18](#) of this volume demonstrates, it would be a grave error to assume that modern 'authoritarian' variants of the 'national state' form are necessarily 'strong': even more modern technologies of power do not eliminate unevenness in, and resistance to, state centralization.

The standard definitions summarized above also rest on the pervasive opposition between 'the state' and 'civil society' so deeply embedded in the occidental tradition. The notion of 'complexity' is sometimes restricted to the social transformations associated with political change: 'class', 'status', and 'caste'. But it readily shades into the broader sociocultural dimensions of change processes, such as the development of urbanism and transformations in religious organization and intellectual life. The combination of social structural and cultural transformations embraced by this perspective on 'complexity' in turn brings the concept of 'civilization' on to the agenda. In practice, the discussion of early 'state formation' does tend to become entangled with a more general discussion of the evolution of civilization (Jones & Kautz 1981, p. 16). But this apparent 'confusion' could be seen as highly appropriate in the case of 'societies' where the occidental type of distinction between 'the state' and 'civil society' is, in fact, quite inappropriate. In the early states, it seems to be extremely difficult to disentangle an 'autonomous' or 'disembedded' political sphere, and hierarchic relations are not constituted by material bases of power ('property relations') which exist independently of a political hierarchization which is in turn encapsulated by religious hierarchization. As Eisenstadt (1963) demonstrates in his classic comparative work on empires as 'historical bureaucratic societies', the 'disembedding' of the political sphere is also a product of the *development* of state forms, but the fact that the rulers of ancient states may come to pursue 'autonomous' and secular political goals does not necessarily, in itself, make religious hierarchy a less encompassing structure in terms of the relationship between the ruling class and its subjects.

A developmentalist concept of 'civilization' is problematic not simply because it is value-laden, but because its typical diagnostic traits, such as writing and the 'city', do not correlate in a simple way with those phenomena identified with state formation: hence the debates about whether 'urbanism' can be defined in a way which includes the more conventionally literate Classic Maya and the less conventionally or non-literate highland civilizations of the New World within a common evolutionary category (Wheatley 1971). Yet one might look at the whole issue in a quite different light by looking at the 'cultural' dimensions of 'social and political complexity'. It may be true that the Aztecs were 'developing' a phonetic subsystem alongside the oral interpretative system which accompanied their picture-writing in the late preHispanic period, but it is perhaps more important to observe that when the Spanish ordered the physical destruction of the ancient books, they repeated what the Aztecs had themselves done when establishing their own hegemony. For both cultures, the pictographic system was a repository of knowledge relevant to power, albeit in different ways. Zuidema (1982) has argued, *contra* Goody (1977) and others, that the

absence of a conventional form of 'writing' in Incaic civilization was no barrier to the development of sophisticated systematic knowledge. Intellectual systems are determined by the types of 'interests' stimulated by underlying cosmological systems rather than by sociological needs which create universal 'stages' against which particular cultures' achievements must be evaluated (Zuidema 1982). If the solution to the practical conundrum of how the Inca organized their state system without a script is to be found in such media as textile patterning, the same cultural products also reveal the cosmological substance underlying Incaic conceptions of status, political hierarchy, and power.

Inca status hierarchy was based (among other things) on differential access to certain types of cloth and other prestige goods: one can, and must, study the 'political economy' of the Inca state in terms of the way such forms of control were elaborated and deepened, alongside the elaboration of new types of social statuses and control over labour and productive resources. But the conceptual framework of 'political economy', which Marx, after all, denounced for presenting a *fetishized* understanding of social relations within occidental capitalist culture, is even less appropriate, in a sense, to the Inca case. The symbolic meanings which give these non-commodities their 'value' in political and status-building terms, just like the significations attaching to ritual practices and forms of social etiquette marking élite status, exist prior to their social manipulation, within Andean cosmological notions of vastly greater antiquity and generality than the Inca state cult.

This is not to deny that the material basis of social power is determinant of its realization, nor is it to deny that 'culture' and the meaning of hierarchy is something which is shaped by particular historical experience, and negotiated, manipulated, asserted, resisted, challenged, and reinforced through social practices. Our existing knowledge of ancient societies already seems to demonstrate quite conclusively that élite cultic practices which may play a significant active part in achieving processes of political centralization (Conrad & Demarest 1984) may ultimately be rejected by the 'societies' over which they provide a meaning structure for political domination. In his discussion of the Hawaiian case in [Chapter 3](#) of this volume, Spriggs notes that an ideology of 'hierarchical chiefly encompassment' persisted in Hawaii, so that 'the question "why chiefs?" never seriously arose in discourse in the Hawaiian context' (in the pre-colonial period) and 'we could say that there was no developed class consciousness'. But he also draws our attention to the cases of the Marquesas and Easter Island, where he suggests that the question did arise, and chiefly efficacy was 'challenged by declining conditions of productivity'. This indicates a contradiction between the meaning structure of chiefly hierarchy and its practical achievements in the sphere of 'prosperity', though the 'challenge' might be mediated through rising social tensions of various kinds and involve various types of responses from the population at large to the significance of what was being experienced in ideological terms, as the different strata grappled with the problem of the meaning of their changing experience.

In the case of stratified 'peasant' societies in which elaborated élite ideologies serve as what Mann has termed 'immanent ideologies of ruling class morale', unifying incorporated local 'ethnic' élites into empire-wide 'ruling classes', the notion that

political stability implies a shared normative framework is even more dubious. Dominant class ideologies and ritual practices may neither be shared by the state's subjects, nor even be 'understood' by them in any sense besides that of signifying power difference and making power differentiation meaningful (Wolf 1966, pp. 105–6, Patterson 1986). No form of domination is probably ever wholly legitimate, and it is the realities of coercive power which ensure that *cultural* practices typify the 'normal' forms of inter-class 'resistance' in stratified societies rather than direct rebelliousness (Skocpol 1979, p. 32, Scott 1976, pp. 225–40). But this only serves to reinforce the importance, first, of recognizing that all relations of social domination are encapsulated by symbolic meaning structures, and secondly, of examining how the content of such meaning structures varies in different historical contexts. The progressive, but not necessarily total, 'disembedding' of various alternative sources of social power from more unitary hierarchic relations in the course of the development of 'civilizations' can hardly even be discussed if we start from a total disjunction between 'state' and 'social' power which makes no reference to culture.

If a universalizing definition of the state leads to problems which are ultimately those of Eurocentricity, an evolutionist framework is likely to magnify them. The notion of the 'chiefdom' serving as an intermediate 'stage' along an evolutionary trajectory towards the state has found favour among a large number of theorists because it seems to reduce the apparent gulf between 'egalitarian' segmental societies and 'the state'. Yet the 'jump' from even the more 'complex' type of chiefdom structures known ethnographically to 'real' states as defined by a universalizing definition itself still seems a rather substantial one. As Mann again points out, in denying state formation the status of a general evolutionary process, the archaeological evidence would seem to suggest that tendencies towards hierarchization and greater political centralization in prehistory were generally reversible, patterns of devolution following phases of evolution in a cyclical manner in some areas (Mann 1986, pp. 63–70). Shay's [Chapter 7](#) in this book indicates that even 'urbanism' was a reversible development, and she suggests that the devolution which occurred in Bronze-Age Palestine reflected neither invasion, nor 'natural' or anthropogenic ecological deterioration, but the inability of social organization to adjust to changing economic, social, and political conditions. To ask, as Cohen (1978, p. 1) asks, 'what qualities inherent in the human condition propel societies toward the state', might therefore be to ask the wrong question; it would rather be a matter of seeing resistance to state formation as the inherent human tendency, and a transition beyond the absolute rank chiefdom to 'the state' based on 'permanent coercive power' as a rare event dependent on unusual circumstances.

Mann, like many others, conducts his own argument in terms of a (universal) 'working definition' of the state derived from Weber's discussion of 'political communities' (Weber 1978, pp. 901–10):

The state is a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outward to cover a territorially demarcated area, over which it claims a monopoly of binding and permanent rule-making, backed up by physical violence (Mann 1986, p. 37).



Weber himself makes sparing use of the term 'state' in these passages, unfailingly placing it within inverted commas. He observed that the modern concept of the 'state' and its characteristic functions could only apply imperfectly in early historical contexts, where such functions might only be exercised on an intermittent basis or be partly fulfilled by decentralized organizations, and where there would be a less clearly perceptible differentiation between the 'political community' and groups and associations based on kinship, religion, status, and other less inclusive bonds. It is certainly difficult to use the criterion of a state monopoly of the use of force in the context of early states (Carneiro 1981, p. 68). Weber always qualified his own discussions of 'ideal types' with extensive exemplification of their limitations when applied to concrete historical realities, and as Bakker points out in this book, much of the rich vein of insights which might be derived from his historical sociology, arguably the most serious and comprehensive of all attempts by European social theorists to tackle the analysis of non-European civilizations, remains to be explored. On this particular issue, one could read Weber as advocating a more gradualist, evolutionary, model of successive transitions towards increasing centrality, a view which has found favour among many archaeologists and anthropologists.

### **Chieftdom to state: gradual and quantitative transition or non-event?**

Some archaeological critics of the Servicean evolutionist framework of chieftdom-state transition have argued that the 'chieftdom' should normally be seen as an alternative development to the state. Sanders & Webster (1978), for example, argue that the processes which led to 'pristine' state formation were fundamentally different from those which led to chieftdom formation, reflecting the transformation of egalitarian segmental societies through the development of 'social stratification' in the sense of differential access to, arising from exclusivity of property rights over, basic subsistence resources. They allow the Classic Maya the rare privilege of making a transition from 'chieftdom' to 'state', arguing that this exceptional development was based on the peculiar properties of the Peten ecosystem, and discounting the arguments that Maya development reflected 'external' links with urban civilization in the Highlands. On this model, the occurrence of state formation becomes a matter of the 'stimuli' or 'blockages' created by environmental conditions.

Yet some attention to the active social processes of resistance to state formation does seem necessary for two simple reasons. Firstly, despite Sanders & Webster's lack of enthusiasm for models of state formation which rest on processes of intersocietal interaction, it seems difficult to deny that such processes do play an important rôle in social change, through change is not necessarily towards greater political centralization. Where states do eventually form in regions which have displayed recalcitrance towards state formation for millennia, under the influence of particular types of pressures or social changes linked to contact with expansionary state systems,

it is difficult to see the prior absence of state formation simply in terms of local natural environmental constraints on universal emergent properties of human social systems. Secondly, as Gailey & Patterson point out in [Chapter 4](#) in this book, resistance to state formation is a continuing process within a world in which states and political centrality have become permanent features of the social landscape.

But perhaps it is not so easy to dispose of the 'chiefdom' and the problem of 'intermediate' societies. As Carneiro has pointed out, Sanders & Webster still put *something* between 'egalitarian' societies and the state, and that something, a version of Fried's 'stratified society', looks as if it has a political structure which is not hugely dissimilar to a 'chiefdom' (Carneiro 1981, p. 50). What exactly could a 'stratified non-state' society look like in political terms? Carneiro triumphantly observes that even Fried himself failed to find any ethnographic or ethnohistorical examples of this 'phantom concept'. What is at issue here is not really something concerned with 'the chiefdom' as Carneiro (1981, p. 45) defines it: 'an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief. It is a matter of whether political centralization rests on an intensification of 'redistributive' mechanisms of the kind which Service saw as the basis for chiefly authority (devoid of genuine coercive power), or arises from a distinct order of 'social stratification', distinct, that is, from the type of social inequality and material basis for social control found in the ethnographic chiefdoms which Service used as analogies for the precursors of the 'pristine' states.

Carneiro, like Earle (1977) and Wolf (1982), finds Service's mundane economic explanation for the development of chiefdoms in terms of 'redistribution' quite unsatisfactory. 'Redistribution' is, as many writers have observed, a hopelessly vague concept. Redistribution shades into tribute collection. This tribute is then selectively disbursed, both through chiefly alliance and ceremonial exchange networks, and to retainers, warriors, and personal clients. It becomes a 'fund of power'. Wolf suggests that 'redistribution' in this sense can constitute a 'strategy of class formation'. He proposes that we make a distinction between two types of 'chiefdom' to highlight the significance of this: on the one hand, we have chiefdoms based on what he terms 'the kin-ordered mode of production', where the chief and his followers are still embedded in and actually constrained by a system of kinship reciprocities, and on the other hand, we have a second type 'in which the form and idiom of kinship is maintained even as the dominant group transforms divisions of rank into those of class', becoming 'an incipient class of surplus takers in the tributary mode [of production]' (Wolf 1982, p. 97). This sounds like a gradualist formulation of the transition to statehood: Wolf lists a number of processes which might lead to an increasing distance between rules and ruled and the gradual subversion of the kin-based order. But he also notes the difficulties inherent in the consummation of such processes, and argues that 'chiefs' who become 'kings' must 'lay hold of mechanisms which guarantee them independent power over resources' and introduce 'new political instruments of domination' (Wolf 1982, p. 99).

The vagueness of such accounts of the transition from 'redistribution' to 'tribute' encourages Carneiro to maintain his argument that war or the threat of war (under conditions of 'environmental' or 'social' circumscription) provides the key to

understanding the origins of social stratification, the state, and, indeed, chiefdoms themselves. As far as Carneiro is concerned, the basis of 'class society' is the 'war captive', turned into a servile stratum of chiefly retainers in what is, by definition, a three-class type of society. On this view, the evolution from autonomous, segmental, egalitarian village societies to states is a continuous one, premised on the way environmental or social circumscription under conditions of population growth prevents people from escaping emergent relations of domination by removing the possibility of moving away. There is a threshold to be crossed:

A draft is more than a call to arms. Taxation is a greater obligation than voluntary contributions. And promulgated laws are more strictly sanctioned than mere custom (Carneiro 1981, p. 71).

But it is 'a threshold in a continuum', whose gradations are to be explained in terms of the increasing demographic and territorial scale of the political units accruing to the control of victorious chiefdoms as a result of continued militarism.

There are strong theoretical objections to 'militarist' theories of 'original' transitions to statehood, again enumerated by Mann (1986, pp. 54–8), though he does subscribe to a much modified version of the ecologically based circumscription hypothesis with his notion of 'social caging': investment in irrigation facilities (rather than basic low-level 'population pressure' on limited subsistence resources as assumed by Carneiro) provides one of the factors which make the costs of moving away from emergent relations of class domination prohibitive. He sees militarism as becoming significant only once populations were already 'caged' by irrigation, an argument which is not dissimilar in its principles to that of Gilman (1981), discussed by Spriggs in [Chapter 3](#) in this book. Both view the rôle of warfare as the creation of a 'protection racket' in which commoner households submit to increased élite exactions as the price of protection because this represents a lesser evil than the loss of their 'investment' in capital-intensive subsistence technologies. A major weakness of Carneiro's argument lies in his failure to pay attention to an important conclusion to be drawn from two of the studies of Polynesia which he himself cites. As Earle (1977) and Peebles & Kus (1977) demonstrate, the 'political economy' of what Earle calls chiefly 'mobilization' is superimposed on a local group subsistence economy which is organized socially in a way that *insulates* it from the potentially disruptive effects of the endemic intra-domain aristocratic status rivalry and inter-domain warfare characteristic of Hawaii.

Ethnohistorical research on a number of regions has produced results which are directly comparable to those obtained by Earle in Hawaii in this regard. A recently published example is a study of the Quito region of Ecuador, whose chiefdoms were ultimately incorporated into the Inca Empire (Salomon 1986, pp. 140–2), and the principle of local group maximization of subsistence selfsufficiency has been seen as an enduring one even in conditions of greater political centralization in the Andes (Murra 1975). The Quito example can serve as a test case for examining the kinds of transformations which Carneiro postulates as significant steps towards an intensification of centralized power and stratification. Salomon argues that the Lords of Quito possessed the power to dispossess commoners and confiscate their goods,

were war leaders, administrators of village labour, controlled trade in prestige goods, and performed certain judicial as well as ceremonial functions within their communities. But when households needed subsistence products not available locally, they obtained them directly, without chiefly mediation. There is, perhaps, a major distinction to be made between the power of chiefs to assault an individual commoner's property rights in specific circumstances (such as those linked to violations of ritual norms and witchcraft accusations, perhaps linked to status rivalry), and general processes of expropriation which challenge the status of commoners in general. Nevertheless, the Quito chiefdoms also possessed a servile 'class' in addition to the division between chiefs and commoners: though a major part of the chief's revenue derived from the *corvée* labour service of commoner households (the ceremonious 'asymmetrical reciprocity' characteristics of the entire Andean region), the native nobility (along with a few commoner households) commanded a population of retainers detached from normal communal obligations. They numbered around 10 per cent of the total population, a *higher* proportion than in the pre-Incaic heartland zones of the empire. Along with the labour of the nobility's wives, this gave the chiefly household a powerful productive capacity, and the chiefs augmented that capacity further by gathering around them a large kindred, similarly equipped with retinues.

But these were quite tiny societies: even the largest probably did not achieve a population of 2000 souls. Pre-Incaic chiefdoms in the south were substantially larger. Some of the Quito chiefdoms were not even the 'multi-village' polities on which Carneiro focuses his definition of chiefdoms. Yet the degree of 'internal' political centralization and the range of functions and powers of the Lords of Quito does not compare at all unfavourably with larger stratified chiefdoms found in the Andes and elsewhere. What is clear is that these polities were highly unstable and riven with internal rivalries, as, it seems, are chiefdoms in general (Brumfiel 1983, Spriggs, Ch. 3, this volume). Spriggs points out that such chronic political instability in Hawaii did not result in any challenge to the 'system' of chiefly hierarchy, and the type of 'social stratification' which developed there as the social gulf between chiefs and commoners was widened by the kinds of chiefly strategies of class formation Wolf describes. The same would be true of the pre-Aztec 'city state' domains in Mesoamerica which Brumfiel compares, albeit in a qualified way, with the paramount chiefdoms of Polynesia (see below). But in the Quito case, the existence of internal stratification, centred on the chiefly household, does not seem to be leading anywhere. It may have served to limit conflict between the chiefs and commoner households, by augmenting the chiefs' ability to build up 'funds of power' without increasing their exactions on the commoners. But the apparently 'semi-servile' *yanakuna* in Quito do not generally seem to have been a stratum created by warfare and the expropriation of members of conquered kinship communities. Polygyny was not unknown among them: *yana* status does not seem to have corresponded to the *kind* of rank degradation envisaged by Carneiro (Salomon 1986, p. 129). Perhaps part of the problem of understanding the position of the *yanakuna* lies in our implicit use of essentially occidental modes of conceptualizing social inequalities, as Dumont (1970) argued in his classic critique of sociological analyses of the Indian caste system.

It might, however, simply be an error to assume that the social formations of Quito represented an 'archaic' survival from an ancestral Andean past, despite Salomon's own approval for the idea that 'archaic' traits were manifest in these configurations. Though it is relatively easy to isolate the effects of incorporation into the Inca empire upon them, it is less easy to determine the extent to which the structures observed on the ethnohistoric horizon reflected processes of cumulative development and transformation linked to their indirect articulations with expansionary systems in the Andes over a longer timescale, a line of argument which is elaborated in greater theoretical depth in Gailey & Patterson's [Chapter 4](#) in this book. Nevertheless, if we grant that such cases can still legitimately be used to examine the plausibility and sufficiency of particular hypotheses about the processes which might have generated state formation, it seems that there are serious difficulties in the face of the kind of gradualist theory of state origins offered by theorists such as Carneiro.

Very substantial areas of the globe were characterized by chiefdom societies of various kinds at the time of European expansion, and it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that certain variants on the 'chiefdom' theme represented patterns of involution which represented a 'dead end' from the conventional evolutionist point of view. This is indeed exactly what Bargatzky suggests in [Chapter 2](#) in this book in his discussion of Samoa in terms of the concept of a 'ceremonial sequential hierarchy'. Nevertheless, the alternative argument that the rise of the state rested on the emergence of a distinct order of stratification based on 'differential access to basic resources' does not seem any less problematic.

What are 'basic resources'? Food was certainly an essential item in ceremonial prestations as well as a subsistence resource in most 'intermediate' societies, and so it is clear that it belongs to the category of symbolic resources as well as to the mundane world of 'subsistence', assuming such a distinction could have any cultural significance in such societies, which must be dubious. Perhaps, in reality, it is non-subsistence resources which are 'basic' from the point of view of understanding increasing political centralization and the opening up of an unbridgeable social gulf between rulers and ruled. But most analysts who emphasize the notion of social stratification clearly have something much more cognate with the notion of 'economic class stratification' in mind. What types of 'property relations' are envisaged here? To what extent do such accounts depend on assumptions about low-level scarcity of subsistence resources which may not be empirically defensible in terms of the archaeological evidence? We might still wish to argue that unequal access to resources was mediated through unequal political or status relations between persons, so that inequality was initially rooted in political rather than economic relations, as Service has maintained in criticizing what he takes (rightly or wrongly) as the classical Marxist account of state origins (Brumfiel 1983, pp. 263–4).

### **State and class**

If one wishes to take the view that the 'state' developed as an instrument for protecting an emergent system of economic class relations, a model of early social stratification based on some type of property 'ownership' differential and élite

control over means of production, it is certainly possible to recast the notion of 'property' in a way which does not lead one to an absurdly anachronistic conception of individualistic rights in real estate: corporate groups can maintain 'effective control' over the forms in which others have access to land and the tributary obligations that access entails without enjoying an absolute or exclusive right over its disposition of the kind found in modern 'private property' systems. But these are hardly issues which ought to be debated in a theoretical manner, since they are capable of at least a degree of empirical clarification.

We can, after all, pursue the interpretation of the property and stratification systems of some of the successor forms to the earliest states in both the Old and New Worlds through written sources. Only archaeology can give us access to the earliest periods, and it would evidently be naïve to suggest that written sources disclose 'truth' in a straightforward manner, whether they are contemporary 'indigenous' sources being interpreted by modern scholars, or descriptions of native institutions produced by European colonizers. One only has to consider, for example, the divergent interpretations which exist in the field of Aztec period property relations in Mesoamerica (see, for example, Carrasco 1981, Offner 1981, 1984). Carucci's detailed discussion of the Marshall Islands case in [Chapter 1](#) of this book demonstrates that the use of ethnohistorical data entails additional problems of interpretation.

Firstly, we have the problem of how European conceptions generate models of the nature of political hierarchy and property relations which may be a significant distortion of indigenous cultural conceptions, practices, and realities. Secondly, such clouding of the issues in early reports on the nature of indigenous systems—not necessarily totally eliminated in more modern ethnographic studies—is compounded by the fact that, as Carucci demonstrates, indigenous peoples reacted to the new situations created by colonial penetration in an active way, developing their own cultural responses to historical events, and refashioning their political institutions and property systems in a way which often corresponded to differences in the way different communities are incorporated into the colonial socio-economic system. Nevertheless, even if the written sources which bear most directly on prehistoric horizons are not without their ambiguities, they do in principle provide a rich vein of material for postulating base-lines from which to evaluate likely conditions in earlier time ranges, which may be reinforced by the judicious use of ethnographic material as a means of thinking critically about possible interpretations.

It is, however, apparent that the way the issues are being defined is predetermined by a general hypothesis about the state's relationship to the order of social stratification. Take, for example, the alternative perspective embodied in the 'organizational' and 'realist' definition of the state offered by Skocpol, whose concept of 'state autonomy' is criticized by González Chávez in [Chapter 18](#). Skocpol's perspective severs the kinds of connections which Marxists make between state and class, on the one hand, and at the same time contrasts with liberal theorists' emphasis on 'legitimacy' as an explanation for the stability of state structures (Skocpol 1979, pp. 24–32). Her argument for a fundamental similarity between the prerevolutionary social formations of France, Russia, and China also provides a striking contrast with Mann's insistence on the unity and distinctiveness of 'Europe' as a whole and the relative insignificance

of the differences between European 'absolutist' and 'constitutionalist' state forms in world-historical terms (Mann 1986, pp. 475–83). She argues that all three Old Regimes were 'proto-bureaucratic' imperial states in which:

...if, in one sense, the imperial states and the landed classes were partners in exploitation, they were also competitors in controlling the manpower of the peasantry and in appropriating surpluses from the agrarian-commercial economies. Monarchs were interested in appropriating increased resources from society and channeling them efficiently into military aggrandizement or state-sponsored and centrally controlled economic development. Thus the economic interests of the landed upper classes were in part obstacles to be overcome; for the landed classes were primarily interested either in preventing increased state appropriations or in using state offices to siphon off revenues in ways which would reinforce the domestic socioeconomic status quo (Skocpol 1979, p. 49).

The historical societies which Skocpol is discussing here are ones in which decentralized economic class power is strongly developed: not only is land commoditized (along with offices of state and, in the French case, incomebearing seigneurial titles), but the hereditary status aristocracy has fused to a significant extent with the upper echelons of a mercantile bourgeoisie. The first question we might pose in reflecting on this observation is what possible value there could be in stretching the notion of 'class' to cover every thing from the earliest urban civilizations to this kind of context: much more concrete and specific models of the order of social stratification seem to be necessary, and they should be ones which include some attention to the non-economic aspects of decentralized social power. It is, as Skocpol demonstrates, somewhat of the essence in understanding the possibility of agrarian revolution in these cases to appreciate the extent to which landlord power depended on the backing of the state (rather than its autonomous military resources), and genuinely required direct coercive reinforcement against peasant communities which possessed a capacity for self-organization and regarded specific types of landlord claims on their surplus as wholly illegitimate. At the same time, we should note that agrarian revolt in France struck at seigneurial rights specifically, rather than at proprietary rights of other kinds: the limits of collective peasant action in this case were set by the deep penetration of private property rights and commodity relations into the peasant community itself (Skocpol 1979, pp. 126–8).

If our concern is with much earlier periods in history, then it seems clear that we are generally dealing with 'corporate peasant communities' of a very different type. It would not be completely appropriate, perhaps, to describe such low-level corporate units as the Andean *ayllu* or the Mesoamerican *calpulli* as 'kinship-based' communities in too literal a sense. Indeed, the flexibility and malleability of the Andean kinship system—the ability of the *ayllus* to incorporate 'outsider' households through fictive kinship and children's opportunity to claim affiliation to the mother's natal

group-underpinned the efficacy of this cultural framework not simply as a means of allocating access to resources in terms of intracommunal reciprocal rights and obligations but also as a means of carrying through strategic decisions with regard to questions of status-building and prestige. Neither the Andean nor the Mesoamerican community was 'egalitarian' in ethos, and the marked ritualization of all matters relating to 'reciprocity' in the Andes, sometimes naïvely taken as an index of 'communalism', more plausibly reflects the perennial conflicts over property and status rivalry which marked the relationships between close agnates (Spalding 1984, p. 60).

As already noted in the case of the peripheral zone of Quito, local ethnic 'chieftains' (*kurakas*) formed a stratum of non-workers sustained by the labour tribute of *ayllu* members, and also enjoyed privileged claims to prestige goods such as *coca* and precious metals, acquired through the labour of the colonists dispatched to distant resource zones under what Murra has termed the 'vertical archipelago' system (Murra 1975). The Incaic system of surplus appropriation at first built on these pre-Incaic foundations, but gradually began to assault the *ayllu* community in a fundamentally different way, removing people from their enclavement in *ayllus* and transforming them into retainers tied by bonds of personal dependence to the state or individual aristocratic corporations. Though the existence of a retainer stratum was pre-Incaic, and is subject to the problems of interpretation already touched on in the case of the Quito chiefdoms, the intensification of these relationships in the Incaic period has been seen as a qualitative rather than purely quantitative transformation by almost all the analysts of the region (see, for example, Murra 1980, Schaedel 1978).

This process correlates with another which could be described as a process of class formation cross-cutting previous particularistic ethnic divisions between religious and secular local élite groups, which is in turn linked to the processes of state expansion and consolidation (Patterson 1985, Gledhill 1988). This may be a critically important moment of transition: Gailey & Patterson, in [Chapter 4](#) of this book, argue that chieftainships should not be seen as indicating incipient class stratification, because 'class relations cannot be sustained over generations without the deflection of kin-based antagonism through the emergence of mediating practices and rulership subsumed as "the state"', so that 'class and state formation are best viewed as an intertwined process'. They see the Inca as a classic example of a 'strong tribute-based state', in which the state and its ruling class are not only able to extract tribute consistently from 'encapsulated kin communities' and specify the goods and services to be provided, but can also 'intervene directly in the subsistence sector and the reproduction of local communities'. The processes associated with the growth of the *yanakuna* stratum involved a certain amount of resource expropriation as well as the expropriation of persons, but it should perhaps be argued that the latter was the fundamental process, since it augmented relationships of 'lordship and servitude' which, in the medium term at least, served to consolidate a ruling class resource base independent of the tribute-corvée relationship between state-class and encapsulated kin community. Even so, only a minority of the Andean population was involved in such relationships at the time of the conquest, and there is ample evidence that the new forms of class relationships imposed by the colonizers were perceived as very different



from their pre-Hispanic antecedents by the aboriginal population themselves (as described in some detail in Ch. 17 in this book).

On the basis of these examples it seems reasonably clear that the history of the state is not simply a result of the emergence of class inequalities. If concepts such as 'status groups' are somewhat unsatisfactory and diffuse because they make no reference to the surplus extractive process which underlies all forms of social stratification, 'class society' and 'class formation' cannot be treated in a universalistic manner, but require substantive content which permits us to distinguish qualitatively different types of situation. Skocpol's approach, and others which argue for the existence of contradictions between centralized state and decentralized class power, indicates, however, that there is a more complex dialectic at work here. Not only is the nature of decentralized class power different in different times and places, but the dialectic of centralization and decentralization which frequently characterizes the long-term vicissitudes of state formation and collapse in a given area may lead to at least temporary reductions in the strength of decentralized power. The Ottoman Empire at its height provides an illustration of this possibility, and Bakker's [Chapter 16](#) in this book provides an extended discussion of the 'patrimonial-prebendal' pole of this dialectic in the context of Indic Indonesia. Rejecting Geertz's *sui generis* model of the 'Theatre State', Bakker also insists that although many Indic states experienced 'periods of centrifugal, feudal-like political organization', this is best seen as a cyclical oscillation towards 'patrimonial-feudal' forms in Weber's sense, and that 'fully-fledged European-style feudalism was never the dominant ideology or structure' in any of them.

### Europe and its 'others'

This last issue returns us to the question of whether the European experience is a distinctive one in world-historical terms. Skocpol's comparison between France and China might suggest that Turner's critique of the Eurocentrism of all 'Orientalist' readings of European and Asian history in terms of polar opposition is correct (Turner 1978). Noting Turner's position in the course of his discussion of Marx's 'Asiatic mode of production', Bakker seeks to demonstrate the continuing explanatory value of the patrimonial-prebendal model for understanding the class structures of Java under the Dutch colonial regime.

Nevertheless, there are significant arguments to be made about the impact on European development of the *particular* type of relationship between decentralized class power and 'the state' which emerged in the European arena. The early medieval state was an extraordinarily puny affair by any standards, and sovereignty was parcellized in a way which corresponded to the radical decentralization of social power (Anderson 1974a, 1974b). The military coercive power possessed by an armoured cavalry over the early medieval peasantry, coupled with the weakness of central state power stemming from this and other factors, underpinned an exceptionally strong, though also markedly conflictive, form of decentralized class stratification. Mann has argued that the contradictions of Christianity intensified this endemic 'class struggle' (1986, pp. 379–90). Hall (1985) and Mann (1986) have suggested that the key feature

of the European civilizational arena was precisely the extent to which the formation of 'civil society' preceded the state, so that the centralizing European monarchies had to adapt themselves to the plurality of elements already dominant within it. Furthermore, these arguments suggest, it was highly significant that Europe did exist as a civilization: Christianity provided an extensive organizational framework for the politically fragmented European world which had implications for its subsequent social, political, and economic development, different in its impact from that of the other world religions on the societies within their respective civilizational arenas. Even if we reject the view that European *societies* constituted a unity expressing a common, distinct 'world-historical dynamic' (Gledhill, Ch. 17, this vol., 1988, 1987), the nature of the European multiple-state geopolitical arena placed the future in the hands of those societies which evolved towards what Hall and Mann term 'organic' state forms, national states of a type that is quite distinct from those that characterized other regions of the world. One might, therefore, argue that the historical possibility of a transition to capitalism and 'legal-rational domination' should ultimately be understood as a consequence of historically specific features of European civilization as a totality.

Clearly, however, even in the case of non-European societies where there is an apparently cyclical pattern of oscillation between centralization and decentralization, such as the Near East or China, there are underlying patterns of long-term transformation at the social level, in such important spheres as the growth of commodity relations and merchant capitalism, and at the cultural and ideological levels, among the most important of which would be at least a limited diffusion of literacy beyond the élites and the appearance of the salvation religions. In China, under the recentralizing regimes of the Ming and Ch'ing, the social distinctions between hereditary aristocrats, gentry landlords, and wealthy merchants were substantially eroded (in a manner reminiscent of France). The imperial state's attempts to limit private agrarian class power and to re-establish a centralized prebendal regime, beginning with the abolition of serfdom, did nothing to stem the underlying transition towards a system of monetized class relationships and proprietary wealth in both town and country. There can therefore be no question of the non-European world being viewed in terms of some notion of 'stationary societies'.

One valuable approach to clarifying the issue of differences between European and non-European social and political forms is to analyse the transformations wrought upon the structures of the latter through the impact of European colonial expansion. If one looks, for example, at the case of Indochina, then the striking increase in the fiscal effectiveness of the French colonial state—by this period, of course, an 'organic' national state rather than a 'proto-bureaucratic' imperial state—in comparison with its 'native' antecedents, is readily apparent (Scott 1976, pp. 91–8). So are the transformations in agrarian structures wrought by colonial capitalism. But as Bakker's [Chapter 16](#) indicates, until 1870, Dutch colonialism in Indonesia followed a course quite different from that which French colonialism was to take in Indochina, and inhibited rather than promoted the development of rural proletarianization. This was not a result of the form of the Dutch state in its homeland, but of the dominance of a mercantilist bourgeoisie within it in this period. In the case of the Spanish colonial regime in the Americas, however, the fact that we are dealing with an imperial state

form seems of the essence in understanding the evolution of the colonial social formation, even if one can specify senses in which the 'European' dimension of that formation influenced its development (Gledhill, Ch. 17 this vol., 1987).

In contrasting these cases, different historical periods are of course being juxtaposed in the evolution of the 'European world economy'. In talking about 'proletarianization' in Indochina, we are talking about a process which begins at the end of the 19th century (Murray 1984). By this period, changes were also in train in Indonesia as a result of the triumph of 'liberal' over mercantilist interests, even if, as Bakker suggests, the legacy of the past continued to shape future developments. The Spanish American empire formed in a still earlier epoch, and pursued a form of 'economic policy' which was very different from that of the emergent 'organic' states. What lends a unity to these diverse moments of European colonial history is not, I think, emergent capitalism, let alone an emergent 'capitalist world economy' in Wallerstein's (1974) sense, but the existence of a multiple states system which canalized the development of all its structurally diverse components in the long term. As so many different schools of thought have emphasized, what was distinctive about Europe was that all attempts at political centralization over the larger European civilizational space-empire formation-failed, preserving this pattern of differential, interactive development and an intense military competition which maintained an impetus towards change. At different moments in the larger system's evolution, and responding to the trends of the day in terms of the perceptions of the day, such diverse regimes as the Bourbons in Spain and the Romanovs in Russia attempted the 'modernization' of structures which the pressures of geopolitical competition had demonstrated a 'weakness'. In many cases, this was to prove 'too little, too late', though the Prussian case provides a clear enough example of a successful 'conservative modernization from above'.

This review indicates that 'Europe' contained a variety of state forms, and a variety of relationships between dominant classes and underclasses, on the one hand, and class and state power, on the other; differences which were not simply of degree. The 'internal' history of particular countries cannot be fully understood without reference to international factors, but the impact of the latter is also affected by the former, through a dialectic of social action which is most inadequately grasped by mechanistic and teleological models premised on reified emergent historical forces such as 'capitalism'. In the colonial world, the pre-colonial past also plays a significant rôle in shaping the colonial and post-colonial future, within a 'modern world system' whose historical unity and stability is increasingly brought into question by localized forms of resistance and perhaps by centrifugal tendencies within 'capitalism' itself, seen, as Preobrazhenski (1965) put it, as a 'system' whose concrete reality was to be 'spontaneous and uncoordinated'.

These concerns should be central to those of archaeologists, and they suggest at least two conclusions that are significant from the standpoint of the study of universal history. The world-historical break represented by 'the rise of the West' cannot be understood in terms of a general, ideal-typical model of Western society and state forms, juxtaposed to a transcended and motionless 'pre-capitalist, pre-modern' universe. The question of the historical origins and distinctiveness of the 'European dynamic' is a complex and significant one, to which archaeologists can contribute in

various ways. The first, and most obvious, task is direct investigation of the roots and processes of European development: archaeological research continues to give us fresh insights even into extensively documented periods in European history (as shown by Harfield in Ch. 9 of this book). It is equally indispensable for filling in the enormous gaps in our knowledge of the 'complex societies' of the nonEuropean world located in later phrases of 'world-historical time'. Less obvious perhaps is the rôle of archaeology in the reconstruction of the history and cultural life worlds of 'the people without history', those populations whose pasts have often been apparently obliterated through their incorporation into the European world, but in fact still exist, creating the present sociocultural diversity and influencing social action in the present. This diverse range of cultural 'pasts' also shapes the future and makes possible a wide spectrum of human possibilities.

Some caution and reflection is necessary at this point. The task should not be defined as 'giving *their* history back to "them"', as Western scholars are sometimes inclined to define it. 'They'—defined as 'ordinary people'—may not see the world in the same way that 'we' do, nor share 'our' view of the 'tasks of science'. 'They' may not, of course, be a homogeneous social collectivity any more than 'we' are. As archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, or whatever, we must ensure that 'people' are involved as participants in research and can contribute to defining the objectives of that research. In other words, 'history' does not have to be something which is 'given' to people by academic activity from on high. It can be constituted as a meaningful, and not necessarily uncritical reality, from below. It would be false to claim that 'the people themselves' already 'know' the truth of their history in an absolute sense. Field research in anthropology often reveals that there are questions which are posed by 'people' quite independently of the intervention of third parties, and it would be absurd to argue that sensitivity towards the world-views of others forbids a dialogue regarding the kinds of histories which might be constructed on the basis of such premises and what they signify. 'Oral histories' which turn out to be constructs at variance with the picture presented by the archaeological record may contain 'truths' of a different order (as cognized models of the nature of power and domination, for example). They may also be significant ideological artefacts related to fundamental social cleavages. No one has an automatic 'right' to pose these sorts of questions, just as it is important that we accept that the 'dead' also have rights, particularly from the viewpoint of cultures which have a very different view of the nature of 'death' from ours. In some areas, archaeologists must be prepared to give ground on the claims of 'science'. But we should have enough confidence in each other as human beings to believe that a genuine dialogue is the only way forward, and that the social and historical sciences can only be enriched as a result. The results, whether 'theirs' or 'ours', or, hopefully, a synthesis of both, will, however, always be some form of *objectification* whose 'truth' can only be provisional and incomplete.

### **Archaeological perspectives on state formation**

We might conclude that archaeology should look at the problem of 'the origins of the state' in a different way from what which is propagated in evolutionist

approaches. We could see it as a specific type of trajectory of historical transformation which created 'political communities' of a new type relative to their precursors, without making an *a priori* commitment to a definitive statement of the substance of that transformation. It is necessary to avoid the creation of a simple and absolute definitional divide between state and stateless societies, or dependence on an underspecified notion of social stratification. If we wish to understand the factors which make it possible to transcend the apparently deep-rooted forms of resistance to the kinds of intensification of élite power which are made manifest in the instability and conflictual nature of complex chiefdoms, it is surely necessary to have a very precise grasp of the content of the relations of dominance which characterized what we call 'pristine' states.

This approach places a heavy responsibility on the archaeologist: it is possible that the type of situation which characterized the earliest manifestations of 'civilization' has no precise parallels in later periods of history when expansionary state systems were a factor in the development of neighbouring populations, or, more generally, social change was the product of interactions between state-organized and other types of societies. At the same time, archaeology undoubtedly possesses certain strengths in comparison with other disciplines. It works with material on relatively long-term change processes over extensive geographical regions. A regional focus seems of crucial importance, since the fixation of many theories with agricultural intensification has tended to obscure the possible importance of the fact that the environmental settings of 'pristine' state formation cannot be defined purely in terms of aridity and its agricultural implications. The 'nuclear areas' of ancient civilization were also characterized by intense interactions between nomadic and sedentary populations, interactions which linked farmers to fishermen, gatherer-hunters and pastoralists (as shown by Boehm de Lameiras in Ch. 5 of this volume). Though many of the ecologically oriented theorists discount such considerations, partly because of a rather unimaginative view of the significance of 'exchange' in ancient societies and the rôle of cultural interactions, it is worth reflecting on the scale of the regions implicated in the processes of early state formation: if one asks why urban civilization developed in the Basin of Mexico and not, for example, in the Colorado drainage, it might be significant that the latter was not subject to the process of interaction between highland and lowland tropical zones which characterized the early stages of the evolution of civilization in Mesoamerica.

In considering the longer-term processes of state development in particular regions, a number of the chapters in this book emphasize the need to locate the analysis of state formation within larger systems of historical interaction, and indicate the complexity of the dynamics of growth and collapse, and cyclical and cumulative development, which are revealed by such a perspective. At the same time, a macro-regional framework provides insights into the way new types of social formation emerge on the periphery of established centres as effects of preceding development processes. As noted earlier, if we were to reevaluate the data on 'chiefdoms' which are found on the fringes of expansionary civilizations in the light of this kind of perspective, then the 'archaism' often ascribed to such marginal societies might prove illusory. This larger perspective also helps us to discern the way in which changing stratification

systems and technologies of power in 'core' regions may induce new contradictions, forms of resistance or world-historically significant new expansionary power infrastructures in 'peripheral' regions. Gailey & Patterson's analysis in [Chapter 4](#) suggests that it may be possible to make generalizations about the types of structures which are likely to develop in societies surrounding the centres of state formation and expansion in terms of the types of structures which develop in the 'core', and that the stability of state systems themselves depends on 'the degree of centralization and dissolution of subject people's kin communities on the one hand, and the associated degree of comunal disintegration on the periphery, on the other'.

As Spriggs demonstrates in his [Chapter 3](#) discussion of Hawaii, and Darling in his [Chapter 8](#) analysis of Benin, ethnographically and historically based analyses can generally benefit from infusions of archaeological data. Darling's analysis also confronts the constructions of Benin oral 'dynastic traditions' with the evidence of archaeological survey work, producing an illuminating critique not only of 'interpretative histories' based on uncritical use of oral sources but also of the way in which extrapolation back from the dynastic horizon into the past has led to the imposition of 'uni-directional evolutionary models' on to 'the often disordered events of historical reality'. At the same time, the possibility that the types of social system from which states were originally realized may well have been different in structure from the ethnographic cases which have been offered as analogies for 'transitional' forms in prehistory may not preclude archaeologists from continuing to draw insights about process from ethnographic and ethnohistorical cases, if we handle such analogies with greater care.

The small political units which characterized the decentralized periods preceding the formation of supra-regional 'empires of domination' in such regions as Mesoamerica possessed many of the characteristics of 'chiefdoms' as revealed by ethnographic and ethnohistorical research in regions such as Polynesia. Their rulers' grip on power was tenuous, factionalism and usurpation rife, and the weakness of institutionalized coercive power encouraged commoners to seek redress for their own grievances by supporting rival contenders; polities would frequently fission, and commoner communities might gravitate from one domain to another (Brumfiel 1983, pp. 268–9). On the other hand, no kinship link was recognized between rulers and ruled, and there could therefore be no question of the system's being constrained by an ideology of kinship-rank reciprocities. Élite identity was based on claims to 'Toltec' descent.

This might lead us to conclude that the 'city states' of the period before the rise of the Aztecs cannot be taken as surrogates for the types of societies which preceded the formation of the first state systems in the region. The essence of pre-Aztec civilization was precisely that it was urban-centred, a powerful set of cosmo-magical symbols focused on the city defining the nature of 'society', despite the instability of actual settlement and massive population dislocations which characterized the history of the region (Carrasco 1982). Nevertheless, the example does suggest the limitations of the kind of points made by writers such as Wolf in discussing how absolute rank chiefdoms might shift towards statehood as chiefly lineages become an 'incipient class of surplus-takers', or Carneiro's focus on warfare. However much rulers try to manipulate

'redistributive' or 'mobilizational' mechanisms for the deployment of social wealth to increase the gulf between elite and commoner lineages and transcend their dependence on what can be extracted from their own subjects, permanent status gaps, and denial of even distant kinship, do nothing to inhibit resistance from below in the face of political competition at the top. Endemic warfare probably does not eventuate in the construction of a supra-regional state simply because someone finds a better general. What transformed the situation in the longer term was a set of time- and context-dependent processes which subverted the rule of local city-state dynastic rulers and consolidated a more unified aristocratic stratum across the Basin of Mexico, capable of acting as a unified 'ruling class', on the one hand, and supportive of the expansionism which underpinned the progressive consolidation of an 'imperial' centre. There are clear structural and organizational differences between the Aztec period state of Tenochtitlan and the first highland supra-regional state, Teotihuacán (Boehm de Lameiras, Ch. 5, this volume, Sanders et al. 1979). But to the extent to which any analogy between cases separated by irreversible historical sociocultural transformations is meaningful, the lesson to be learned is again that the processes of state formation cannot be understood in terms of the 'internal' transformation of individual 'societies'.

In the end there is no way to resolve the issue of state origins without attempting a detailed reconstruction, via archaeological materials, of the critical transitions which gave birth to the first manifestations of 'civilization'.

Both the starting point and the end points of such processes require analysis, and though certain stages of the process may be readily identifiable by evident discontinuities in the archaeological record, such as the radical shift in settlement pattern associated with the rise of the urban megalopolis in the Teotihuacán Valley, it is by no means self-evident what kind of power structures even such apparently dramatic shifts actually represent. There can be no denying that archaeological theory-building in the past has been heavily biased towards certain sorts of 'materialist' explanations. Yet as Eric Wolf remarked, in summarizing the fruits of a symposium on more than a decade of work on Teotihuacán, days of discussion, and years of reading, had left him still asking a rather fundamental question: 'what was Teotihuacán *about?*' (Wolf 1976, p. 8).

Today's archaeology is certainly increasingly sensitive to that kind of question, and at least some archaeologists are now willing to argue that the location of this great prehistoric metropolis might have more to do with the place of the valley and its 'natural' topographic features in the cosmological landscape of highland Mesoamerica than simply the quality of its soils under irrigation (Coe 1981, p. 167). On the other hand, archaeology should certainly not abandon its commitment to the investigation of process. As Darling's study in [Chapter 8](#) of the rise of Benin demonstrates, it is of enormous importance to know whether processes were gradual and evolutionary or sudden and discontinuous. He argues that the evidence does not support a model of the gradual extension of a network of politico-religious control emanating from Benin over an extended period of time, but suggests rather a sudden and traumatic shift, involving, among other things, a radical reorganization of religious practices. An increasing sensitivity to 'culture', and a dissatisfaction with older types of 'materialist'

theory does not, I think, force archaeology into a headlong rush to idealism or a cultural determinism which would be just as reductionist as its predecessors, and perhaps more historically particularistic than many would feel desirable. The cosmological systems which underpinned early forms of social hierarchy and political centralization were material realities, even if they represented fetishistic forms of human consciousness.

Here, to return to the starting point of this discussion, there is certainly some scope for theoretical synthesis and the bringing together of what are at present diverse and opposed theoretical perspectives without a total fudging of the issues. The current willingness, particularly of younger archaeologists, to think in a more synthetic and less doctrinaire way is well exemplified by Knapp's comprehensive discussion of Cyprus in [Chapter 10](#) of this book, which weds together 'concepts from development economics and political anthropology [and] a materialist perspective on ideology', and links the analysis of 'internal' social process to the impact of external events in the broader Bronze-Age Mediterranean world. Citing Asad (1983), he remarks:

The relationship between ideology and power—economic, social, or political power—is expressed not only in the manner in which élites or other special interest groups utilize religious ideology to establish, challenge, or change a specific social order, but also in the sense in which power establishes 'religious' personalities, authorizes specific religious practices and their insignia, defines what is to be believed, and in fact constructs religious ideology.

Though much may remain to be debated on issues such as this, there can be no doubt that archaeology today is a discipline which is more open to reflection on basic conceptual issues in the social sciences than it has ever been in the past, and that this is a guarantee of its future health and development. So too is Knapp's conclusion that his 'interpretative scenario' will 'certainly have to be modified and refined with cumulative archaeological and socio-historical analysis'. Furthermore, as Boehm de Lameiras shows in her discussion in [Chapter 5](#), of the rôle of irrigation, the combination of ethnohistorical and archaeological research can still produce important new insights on established themes by bringing new factors and perspectives into the picture. Her model draws out the complexity of historical processes within an extensive civilizational arena containing socially heterogeneous populations continually interacting with each other in a dynamic way, and both the cyclical and cumulative change processes arising from the 'continuous destruction and rebuilding of peasant and urban communities', a far cry from the simple and mechanistic evolution-ism and techno-economic determinism which has become the standard polemical account of the Wittfogel model from which she draws her initial inspiration.

If new syntheses, and wholly new perspectives, are to be achieved, there can clearly be no question of archaeology's working in isolation. As this volume so clearly demonstrates, grappling with the problems of interpretation posed by the ethnographic and historic horizons provides an indispensable control on the types of reconstruction which are made of the past, and an invaluable source of new directions.



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# RANKED SOCIETIES AND THE TRANSITION TO STATEHOOD



*Small fish in a big sea: geographical dispersion  
and sociopolitical centralization in the  
Marshall Islands*

LAURENCE MARSHALL CARUCCI

The Marshall Islands, which at present consist of two island chains and two isolated atolls, have been ruled by 'paramount chiefs' and local island chiefs since the beginning of the colonial era (1885). The two island chains, Ratak and Relik, are made up of 27 atolls or low islands. Most are dispersed at fairly regular intervals, one or two days' sailing distance from one another. In contrast, the two isolated atolls, Enewetak and Ujelang, are 100 kilometres or more from their nearest neighbours. Each atoll can comfortably support from 100 to 2500 people depending on size and on differential environmental conditions. But, while atoll size has something to do with the development of a group of recognized leaders, it correlates poorly with the distribution of chiefly power. To understand this phenomena, it is necessary to consider the physiographic relations of the various atolls, differential contact with the West and, most importantly, indigenous ideas about the notion of chieftainship. The contention of this chapter is that 'chieftaincy' is a plyable ideological construct that derives from a comparison of local hierarchies and largely European ideas of 'the chief', perhaps with Japanese notions incorporated as well. At the same time, the means of maintaining and extending modes of indigenous domination were shaped and differentially reinforced by outsiders. Thus, the final product is a complex interplay of geophysical and ideological factors that are mediated and moulded, neither consistently nor necessarily rationally, by historical events.

These conclusions derive from the analysis of extensive field notes gathered on Enewetak and Ujelang Atolls in combination with the accounts of other anthropologists. These materials are compared with published documents on Bikini Atoll and those from other parts of the Marshalls. The latter include the works of anthropologists as well as records and impressions of missionaries, sailors, and scientific investigators of earlier eras. In combination, these documents reveal the outlines of environment, the social and political organization, and the various collective world views of Marshall Islanders.

All accounts of the Marshall Islands to date have assumed a particular view of chieftainship as a type of extant reality. Usually it is a view of 'traditional' ideas (said to be remembered from around the turn of the century) that are then contrasted

with newer social forms radically reshaped and destroyed by culture contact. For example, William Alkire (1972, pp. 37–42) suggests that:

Marshallese society is composed of a number of matrilineal clans (*jowi*) which are nonlocalized, exogamous descent groups similar in form to those described in the central Carolines. The most important corporate descent group is the lineage (*bwij*), which is first and foremost a landholding group with a seat at a particular *wato*. The head (*alab*), usually the eldest male of the senior line of the lineage, is steward of the lineage land holdings. Ordinary lineage members work the lands and pass a percentage of their produce to the lineage head, some of which he keeps and some of which he passes on to those higher-ranking political figures who have rights in the land involved.

...Title (to land) is divided and shared by several levels of the society. The common members of a lineage have use rights, and although in traditional times a chief theoretically could dispossess them since he held ultimate title, he would have been foolish to do so, for this wealth depended on their labor and tribute payments. In effect, a chief's power corresponded to the number of commoners in his realm. Symbolizing these levels of ownership were two basic levels of titles. The lowest and most important in day-to-day affairs was the lineage *alab*, who organized and directed lineage activities and allotted lands for use to different descent lines within the lineage. The second level was that of the chiefs (*iroij*) who held title over an island or atoll. A third kind of title was that of *bwirak*, individuals on the 'fringe of nobility'—to use Mason's terminology—who, being descended from mixed commoner-chiefly marriages, did not have full chiefly rights.

This account gives a basic review of knowledge agreed on by other anthropologists (e.g. Mason 1947, 1954; Tobin 1958; Kiste 1974). Spoehr (1949) and Kiste (comm. with Alkire, 1968) have noted distinct bilateral tendencies on both Majuro and Kili, and these tendencies were, at the time of my research, the predominant organizing principles on Ujelang and Enewetak (Carucci 1980). But whether one chooses to attribute these different accounts to regional variation or interpretative fiat, the above quotation constructs for us a particular view of 'traditional chieftainship', an anthropological image of hierarchy devoid of temporal attachment. The portrait is a complex symbol that represents a multifaceted illustration of chiefly hierarchy. By detaching itself from history, this representation of hierarchy limits its ability to tell us about the shape of chieftainship in various places and at various times. This chapter suggests a more sensitive and dynamic portrayal of Marshall Islands' hierarchy and rank. While Alkire's representation provides a concise anthropological symbol to contrast with other Micronesian political arrangements, we shall seek to deconstruct the components of this anthropological signifier of the chief in the context of our

knowledge of various parts of the Marshall Islands, and reassemble it in light of historical documents that supplement our current knowledge.

Alkire begins to contextualize his chiefly portrait in subsequent paragraphs, but leaves the task incomplete (1972, pp. 37–42):

Shortly before initial European contact a chief of Ailinglaplap was able to extend his control over most of Ralik (except Eniwetok and Ujelang) [these are not considered part of Ralik by their inhabitants—L.M.C.J. Periodically thereafter the occupant of this office made a circuit of these islands with his retainers to collect tribute. The chain subsequently was divided into two districts, one including Namu and the islands north, the other Jabwot, Ailinglaplap, and the islands south. Although all of these islands were ‘owned’ by the paramount chief, he rarely called at those further north than Kwajalein and Ujae, largely because they were somewhat isolated and too impoverished to provide any worthwhile tribute. Within the northern islands themselves, stratification was less elaborate in comparison to those of the south. On Bikini, for example, the island council made most important decisions.

Ratak was similarly organized but far less centralized. The whole chain was never unified under a single paramount chief, although the chief of Maloelap was able to put the islands to the north (except Mejit) under his control. Majuro and Arno broke away from his alliance, however, and again became independent political units. The Ralik and Maloelap alliance thus were both in a state of flux and varied in size as local chiefs tested the strength of their island *vis-à-vis* the paramount chief. This tendency toward fission encouraged the paramount chief to move his residence from island to island to make his control clearly visible to the local district chiefs.

As we shall see, the image of the paramount chief is one that is created and supported by Europeans. In the above quote, ‘shortly before European contact’ should read ‘shortly before the beginning of German rule (1885)’, since it was at this time that atoll chiefs were able to consolidate their power and maintain control of many different atolls. As Tobin notes (1958), restrictions on warfare served to crystallize political arrangements in their late 19th century form. Indeed, the missionaries were the first to discourage warfare. It also did a disservice to local traders, but it continued until formally outlawed under German governance.

The ‘less elaborate stratification within the northern islands’, another point Alkire mentions, deserves further attention. It is clearly true that the drier climate of northern atolls provides sites less suited to large populations. Moreover, their physiographical peripherality makes them unlikely candidates for chiefly centres. Once again, however, such generalizations must be placed in historical context, for the era when the island council was deciding issues on Bikini is a much later moment than that when chiefs and their retainers were making rounds to collect tribute or changing residence to strengthen alliances. Moreover, historical circumstances have created centres in the



Marshall Islands as unlikely as was Oahu in the Hawaiian chain. And each such event required a concomitant readjustment in the ideas and actions of those in power.

Temporally specific constructs of chieftainship reveal a complex series of images of hierarchy. An analysis of three such portrayals helps to place these symbols.

In 1529 the Spanish explorer Saavedra made the first extended contact with residents of the area we now call the Marshall Islands. Hezel estimates that the atoll was most likely Enewetak, or perhaps Bikini (Hezel 1983, p. 16), but in either case the chronicler, Vincente de Napoles, made note of certain specialists—particularly a sorceress and a chief (Wright 1951). In this encounter, preliminary constructions of the Marshall Island's chief begin. Western categories are imposed on social actors to classify their actions—to translate them into comprehensible forms. In this case, the 'chief' happens to be the occupant of a house to which the visitors were led and at which they were feasted. This leader is also the only indigenous witness to withstand Saavedra's demonstration of his musket. Others fled to outer islets, to hiding spots in the bush, or fell prostrate at the scene.

Use of the term chief implies the existence of certain characteristics which are, however, not recorded in this scanty account. It is those missing features that have atrophied in Alkire's account, and these flesh out our picture of the Marshallese chief. In the 1972 sketch a second type of mystification has also taken place—one in which the ethnologist collapses the temporal dimension into 'then' and 'now'. Napoles, having a Spanish model of royalty and a single 'token' or event on which to base his record, could not overgeneralize his portrayal—his 'type'. Ideas about social groups and equilibrium come to anthropologists from Durkheim through Radcliffe-Brown. They allow Alkire to speak in the abstract of traditional and modern systems. As we would expect, these abstract 'types' are not found in the Spanish chronicle.

As will become evident, a complex dialectic interrelates portrayals of chiefs and their demeanour, a dialectic mediated in part by the fact that Marshallese leaders are treated as if they held the powers attributed to them by the Europeans who interacted with them. It is precisely this dynamic between European portrayals, European treatment, and indigenous reinterpretation that contributes to the differential shape of the idea of what it means to be a chief in the Ratak or Relik Chains and on Ujelang and Enewetak. Portrayals of the Marshallese chief were reinforced, but not radically reshaped, until the early 19th century. By that time, European models of the primitive had been refashioned by Voltaire, Rousseau, and Keate. With such an image of the noble savage in mind, Otto von Kotzebue entered the Ratak chain in 1817 with his crew of scientific explorers. Kotzebue's party spent nearly three months on Wotje and Aur and returned in 1824 and 1825 for briefer stays (Kotzebue 1821, 1830).

Kotzebue's idealism is most obvious in the improvements he had in mind for the local residents. Customs such as infanticide, of which he disapproved, were not taken as a sign of inherent degradation. Rather, Kotzebue saw them as the result of a lack of technical knowledge and tools, and he took it upon him self to remedy this lack. At the same time, his idea of chieftainship is moulded by a multiplicity of images of European derivation and of Polynesian experience (as reshaped through European eyes). A dictionary from the expedition includes the term *iroij* 'chief' and while 'Kotzebue did not find in the Marshalls the "base servility" that was shown chiefs in

parts of Polynesia' (Hezel 1983, p. 94) he presumed that the chiefs held title to all lands and property. Kotzebue documented that one powerful chief, Lamari of Aur, had killed a number of leaders from neighbouring atolls, and had united the northern Ratak under his control. Kotzebue contributed tools and weapons to Lamari's forces and, upon his return, he learned that Lamari had used these items in a battle that left him in control of Majuro. He then planned to extend his control over atolls in the Relik chain.

Clearly, Kotzebue correctly portrays the chiefs as holding considerable authority of commoners. They were also able to extend their influence to more than one atoll, though in Lamari's case (as with the powerful chiefs who followed) the ability to maintain regional control is highly dependent on a Western concept of powerful indigenous rulers and on the visitors' technological support of local conquests. Kotzebue's interpretation of the chief's sovereignty is less certain. He suggests an image of a supreme ruler with full title to all territory. This is an early 19th century European and American interpretation of Hawaiian land tenure, and Kotzebue had come to 'Radack' directly from Hawaii where he found commoners to be totally servile. His statements about chiefs having full title to all property derives from a context in which Kotzebue voices his disagreement with the idea of chiefly prerogative. Specifically, he is upset that the chief from neighbouring Aur, Lamari, appropriated goods and foods that Kotzebue left in the hands of Wotje residents. Thus, it is important to reassess his statement about chiefs having 'rights to all property' in the context of the situation. Lamari had demonstrated his chiefly source of strength by defeating local Wotje chiefs. Many goods could thus be appropriated by Lamari without implying that he actually 'owned' all land. Indeed, *ekkan* 'first fruits' would be owed to him to symbolize his position as ruler of the land (cf. Tobin 1958, pp. 5, 12). Chiefs also had the right to flotsam. Gifts from foreigners not uncommonly fit into a local conceptual schema as jetsam. Thus many types of 'property' may have been appropriated by Lamari without implying that he personally held ownership rights to the land.

When Kotzebue returned to Ratak in 1825, his friends on Wotje and Aur had not been uprooted. They remained on the land. Thus, the idea of chiefly ownership seems to have been somewhat different from that supposed by some authors. This is borne out by a comparison of chieftainship throughout the Marshall Islands. As Alkire suggests, Bikini had community decisionmaking processes that were quite different from the chiefly hierarchies of central Ratak and Relik (cf. Kiste 1974). The island council is a modern pattern, but local chiefs during the Japanese era were more tightly constrained by the desires of the community than was the case with their contemporaries from the centrally located atolls. Tight constraints on chiefly power were likely on all of the northern atolls and is the pattern that Ujelang and Enewetak residents claim for the early 20th century chiefs.

Complementing the constraints members of the community placed on chiefly power is the fact that on Enewetak, chiefs (in the past as today) in no sense hold ownership rights to the entire atoll. When Enewetak residents were relocated on Ujelang, the two chiefs received the same land as did other residents. In addition, each received a special parcel on an outer islet. Members of each chief's 'half' contributed labour to copra production on those two parcels but, as Tobin notes (1958, p. 15), neither received a share of copra produced on the lands of others. This is precisely because the concept

of *ekkan* 'first fruits' had never been transformed into tribute by the market economy. And, as Enewetak people are eager to point out, the land really rests with all clan members. Those who are currently living are allowed to use it, but not destroy it. Chiefs and commoners equally 'own' clan lands. The people give the rights to chiefs (*leilok maron*) when it comes to redistributing land and making sure it is used properly.

Similarly, Ujelang people who have married into the Enewetak community contend that the chiefs who 'sold' the atoll to Germans in a 'rum and trinkets' exchange (cf. Tobin 1958, p. 14) did so illicitly since they had no right to sell land (*re jab maron wia kake bwidij*). They could give Germans rights to use atoll lands, but could not alienate those lands.

Most commonly, the differences between peripheral islets and the central Ratak and Relik 'paramount' chieftainships are attributed to ecological and cultural diversity. I suggest that, while in one sense ecology is important, the variations must be accounted for by differential historical influences that created 'paramount chiefs' in the central Marshalls and overlooked isolated, less productive areas. These historical factors are grossly distorted by accounts that attempt to compare a single 'traditional' mode of life with a generalized modern pattern.

For example, like Alkire's account, the detailed work of Tobin on Marshallese land tenure contends that (1958, p. 5):

In the pre-contact period, the paramount chief, (*iroij lablab* or *iroij elap*) that is the senior ranking member of the senior lineage of the ruling clan... was the acknowledged owner of all the land and all movable and fixed property in his realm, in a socio-economic system roughly analogous to the feudal system of medieval Western Europe or, closer at hand, to the social system of pre-contact Polynesian cultures.

The comparison with feudal Europe is enlightening for it is likely to be the same comparison that Kotzebue and Chamisso drew upon. The latter had only a small understanding of the Radacker's language (Chamisso's dictionary included about 300 words and some of these seem to have resulted from misunderstandings and inaccurate translations; cf. Finsch 1893). With such limited linguistic abilities, members of Kotzebue's voyage could have done nothing more than draw parallels with European social forms with which they were familiar.

Tobin's 'pre-contact' situation may well be based on Finsch's portrayal of the Marshallese class structure which reminds him of 'the feudal system of the middle ages, with definite, sharply delimited classes' (1893, Hamilton translation, pp. 19–20). Finsch defines four classes:

1) Kajur or Armidsch=man-holding land (i.e. coconut palm trees) only by feudal tenure. 2) Leotakatak—possessing their own property. 3) Burak mostly the sons and brothers of the chief. 4) The Irodsch—chief, must at least on his mother's side spring from Irodsch blood, if his father was only a Burak.

This account, based on sound research in 1889, reveals considerably more hierarchy than did Kotzebue's record. At the same time, it reflects a very different historical moment—one where coconut trees and the land on which they grew had greatly increased in value. Not only did coconut benefit the chiefs much more than commoners but this mode of exploitation also focused on the central Relik chain, where Finsch conducted his investigations (cf. Hezel 1983). We shall see that Enewetak reacted quite differently to king copra.

First, however, Tobin's equation of medieval Europe with pre-contact Polynesian cultures is revealing for other reasons. If we take Hawaii as a typical Polynesian example, our knowledge of pre-contact socio-economic arrangements can tell us certain things about land-holding (Kirch 1984) but not about the ideology that surrounded chiefs. Accounts of chiefs (or royalty), superbly analysed by Valeri (1985), are all post-contact records that must be recontextualized to be understood. In precisely the same way, Kotzebue's and Finsch's accounts must be historically grounded. Using this sort of contextualized reinterpretation, the fact that Hawaiian chiefs could uproot commoners did not mean they had exclusive ownership of land in a European sense. Instead, land was symbolically given to the chiefs, who are themselves 'foreign', by the commoners who, in symbolic terms, are the land (cf. Sahlins 1985). Rights to the land had to be re-established with each new chief and, concomitantly, each king had the right to redivide the lands and place people anew on particular parcels. This entire arrangement is an ideal metaphor that helps us to understand Marshallese chiefly rights and responsibilities. At the same time, the contradictions with the European feudal model are readily apparent.

Does this mean that Tobin's account should be dismissed? Not at all. Like all other accounts, it is a representation—but the symbolic portrait is not from the pre-contact period. Tobin readily admits that 'the Japanese introduced the concept that the chiefs owned the land and the commoners owned the trees growing upon the land' (Tobin 1958, p. 6). Likewise, I would suggest that the idea that the chiefs actually own the land is a late 19th century idea that developed as chiefs and Westerners worked together to shape a new concept of the chief. Such leaders (Kabua is the Marshall Islands prototype) worked to benefit the copra capitalists by providing a mode of planting and harvesting coconuts. Early on, commoners also manufactured coconut oil, a process replaced by drying coconut for transport to a processing facility. Even today, however, coconut oil is given as first fruits to chiefs and dignitaries. However, coconut oil is not mentioned in the earliest explorers' accounts and in all likelihood, it came to represent a pattern of exchange and chiefly hierarchy that developed in the late 19th century.

Indigenous forms of social organization, slightly redefined, were easily adapted to copra production. In other words, Europeans thought about chiefly land rights in feudal terms that were similar to, but not identical with, Marshallese understandings. The new definitions transferred the chiefs symbolic possession of the land into personal ownership. It left no doubts in European minds about who controlled the land. The chiefs became a small intermediary group with whom traders could deal—a much easier task than having to organize an entire labour force. Indigenous concepts, in which land was symbolically 'given' to chiefs, a sign that was reinforced through the act of re-giving first fruits on a seasonal basis, were rigidified in a new form. That

feudal form gave permanent rights to chiefs. But whereas chiefs always controlled the sacred force required to make the lands fertile, and were able to inseminate those lands by blessing and reallocating them, they now also controlled the commoners' access to Western goods.

Such sociopolitical centralization did not occur equally in all areas. Enewetak people claim that in ancient times (probably the late 18th century), two very sacred chiefs, Juraan and Niinjuraan, had extended their influence through warring prowess to include all the northwestern atolls. They were finally defeated on Namu atoll by forces that greatly outnumbered them. This empire is said to have been based on the sacred potency of these two chiefs. This included superhuman power and stature. Western entrepreneurs, however, favoured the central locations of the Relik and Ratak chains where copra could be collected from many atolls with relative ease. Indeed, the entire copra empire was built on the heels of protestant missionaries who had focused their efforts in the late 1850s on Ebon in the southwestern Relik chain. In these accessible copra-producing areas, land became closely identified with chiefs and contributed to the transformation of sacred force into pragmatic power.

Such was not the case on Enewetak where copra land was never of focal value. (Nor does land seem to be as tightly controlled by Bikini chiefs as it is in the southern Relik chain; Kiste 1974.) Enewetak people had experience with copra production on Ujelang atoll where some residents were taken as labourers in the late 19th century. They returned with transformed notions of chieftainship, but ideas about land holding were not changed. Some claim that prior to Jianna's return from Ujelang, Enewetak chiefly lines were matrilineal, as in the Marshalls. Since that time chiefs have been chosen patrilineally. Another group, including the current ruling chiefs, insist on a primordial tradition of patrilineal succession to the rule. In any case, while Germans tried to introduce copra production on Enewetak atoll, most local residents consumed the spongy coconut seedlings instead of planting them, and the control of land remained within the clans and bilateral extended families. *Iroij*, *latoktok*, and *kajur* each worked lands that belonged, in perpetuity, to the families and clans of which they were members. Not until Japanese times were many areas of Enewetak systematically planted and, even then, neither *alab* nor chief received shares of the proceeds from copra produced on atoll lands. (Concomitantly, *alab* on Enewetak and Ujelang now means 'family head' and may be used without any reference to land.) As Tobin notes (1958, p. 15), when Enewetak people were exiled on Ujelang Atoll, each Enewetak chief received some additional copra land on outer islets 'which he exploits with the help of members of his family, and the rest of his people'. This reproduced the situation on Enewetak where the slightly larger lands of chiefly families marked their honoured position.

## Conclusion

Regional variation and a concomitant range of cultural forms are commonly used explanations for differences in political types or chiefly hierarchies in the Marshall Islands. I suggest that, in large part, such differences result from differential contact with and appropriation of historical conditions. Thus, the central Relik

and central Ratak chains have had similar, but not identical, confrontations with Westerners and show concomitant differences in cultural orientation. The ways in which southern Relik discursive style has become the cultural norm (the standard dialect) is a prime example. Copra production has, likewise, had diverse effects on 'peripheral' and 'central' areas of the Marshalls which equally evoke how Marshall Islanders developed their own cultural responses to historical events. This is not to contend that social forms were the same from place to place in 1529 or 1817. But the fact that centrality was important to copra production had a lot to do with the way Marshallese chieftainship refashioned itself, particularly in relation to land. Likewise, the forms that developed differed in their stress. On Enewetak, for example, patrilineal rule became important. In the central Relik chain, paramount chiefs were reinforced and supported as a Western presence created different conditions under which the idea of hierarchy could develop and change. Diversification of levels was the result on Ailinlablab and Jaluij (central Relik), whereas localized group decision making has been stressed on Bikini and Enewetak. Each of these, however, are processes that created themselves anew as historical conditions changed.

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# *Evolution, sequential hierarchy, and areal integration: the case of traditional Samoan society*

THOMAS B.ARGATZKY

## **Introduction**

According to Johnson (1978, 1982, 1983), there are two modes of hierarchical organization: *simultaneous hierarchy* and *sequential hierarchy*. The social organization of Safata, commonly labelled a 'subdistrict' of the island of Upolu, Western Samoa, is presented here as an example of a particular type of sequential hierarchy, namely, an *occasional ceremonial hierarchy* (henceforth shortened as OCH). In so doing, I both depart from the conventional ethnographic descriptions of Samoan social organization and modify Johnson's concept of sequential hierarchy. I suggest that Safata's OCH is the result of a process of *downward evolution*, or *involution*, in contrast to *upward evolution* which leads to simultaneous hierarchy. I also suggest that Samoan OCHs are permanent and enduring forms of sociopolitical organization that are resilient to qualitative change. Finally, I also consider whether Safata can be classified as an *early state*, according to the principles and definitions set forth by Claessen & Skalník (1978a, 1981). OCHs may also occur in other parts of the globe. If so, the question of which factors are responsible for the evolution of an OCH arises. Answering this may result in the reinterpretation of familiar ethnographic cases of simultaneous hierarchies, such as 'chiefdoms'.

## **Simultaneous hierarchy and sequential hierarchy**

G.A.Johnson (1978) has attempted to show how an increase in the number of information sources contained within an integrated system increases the probability of either fission or the development of hierarchical organization. 'Information sources' are defined on a very general level as minimal relevant organizational units of an integrated system. In a social system, such units can be territorial, population-, residence-, or activity-units.

Fission is not discussed here, I am, rather, concerned with the development of hierarchical organization. The type of hierarchy social scientists are familiar with has been named 'simultaneous hierarchy' by Johnson (1982). System integration in a simultaneous hierarchy is achieved through the exercise of control functions by a



relatively small proportion of the population. Such functions can be exercised simultaneously at a number of structural levels of control within the hierarchy. Thus, the hierarchy 'exists' at any given time. The evolution of a simultaneous hierarchy, however, may not be the only solution to the structural problems created by the increase of the number of the relevant organizational units of an integrated system. A sequential hierarchy, too, may be the answer, and Johnson (1982, 1983) devotes two important articles to the discussion of this form of hierarchical organization among hunter-gatherers and pastoral nomads.

In this chapter I want to extend and thereby modify the concept of sequential hierarchy by applying it to agriculturalists. I believe that it has a much wider range of application than is suggested by Johnson's examples. First, however, I will present some examples of the way that this concept has been used by Johnson.

Camps of !Kung San hunter-gatherers of Botswana exhibit considerable temporal variation in size. Rainy season camps consist of 7–24 people; dry season camps consist of about 35–150. Nuclear families (average size: 3.43 individuals) seem to be the basic social organizational units of rainy season camps, but these families build their huts adjacent to one another in extended family units in dry season camps (average size: 11.43 individuals). In dry season camps the extended family units perform as basic social organizational units (Johnson 1983, p. 177). Problems generated by the presence of too many basal units in the system are resolved by making the operational size of these units larger and the *number* of units smaller. The transition from nuclear families to extended families as basal organizational units thus reveals an operational hierarchy, but not of the 'vertical' simultaneous kind. The formation of a 'horizontal' sequential hierarchy of limited duration during the dry season may facilitate decision-making processes among a people with amorphous leadership only. A group decision would require consensus only among the extended families. This greatly facilitates decision-making processes. Thus, organizational growth occurs in the dry season camps. When the population disperses again during the rainy season, the operational hierarchy dissolves, only to be newly created during the next dry season. Therefore, the term 'sequential hierarchy' is an apt one.

### **The occasional ceremonial hierarchy of Safata**

I now present a simplified ethnographic sketch of a 'subdistrict' in Western Samoa.<sup>1</sup> As Samoans are agriculturalists living in permanent communities, I will have to modify the concept of sequential hierarchy in order to extend its applicability.

Safata is situated in the southwestern part of Tuamasaga on Upolu, the most densely populated island of Western Samoa. While Tuamasaga is normally called a 'district' of Upolu, Safata tends to be labelled a 'subdistrict'. From east to west, Safata comprises nine communities (*nu'u*): Mulivai, Tafitoala, Fausaga, Fusi, Vaie'e, Niusuatia, Lotofaga, Sataoa, and Sa'anapu. Each community is politically independent. Each is governed by its own council of the holders of family titles (*matai*).

There are two kinds of *matai*: aristocrats (*ali'i*) and speakers (*tulafale*). Occasionally one encounters *tulafale ali'i* who combine aspects of both aristocrats and speakers.

The nine Safata communities can be conceived as foci of an intricate network of ceremonial relations between the *matai* titles of the respective communities. When speaking of *matai*, I refer to positions only and not to the persons filling these positions. The personnel change, yet the positions and their ceremonial connections remain.

The sociopolitical organization of Safata (Fig. 2.1) consists of a total system with the nine independent communities, their internal rank order of *matai* titles and their ceremonial addresses (*fa'alupega*) making up the subsystem. The suprasystem consists of a web of ceremonial relations between the nine communities which I will describe below in a simplified way (see also Bargatzky 1988).

- (a) The organizations of untitled men (*aualuma o tane*). Safata possesses two such organizations. According to my main informant, Vasa Komiti, there is the organization of Sa'anapu, Sataoa, and Lotofaga under their leader (*sa'o*) Logona, an *ali'i* from Sa'anapu. Maugana'i, an *ali'i* from Fusi belonging to the great ceremonial family Sa Tunumafono, is leader of the *aualuma o tane* of the other six communities.
- (b) The 'houses of speakers' (*faleupolu*). There are three such houses. The *faletolu* comprises the *tulafale* of Sa'anapu, Sataoa and Lotofaga. The *faleupolu* of the speakers of Fusi, Fausaga, Tafitoala, and Mulivai is called '*alataua*'. The *tulafale* of Vaie'e and Niusuatia make up the third group. The intricate internal structure of this *faleupolu* is not described here.
- (c) The leading speakers (*tulafale taua*) of Safata. Key ceremonial rôles in matters concerning the whole of Safata are played by Faleafulugogo from Sataoa, Soalaupule from Fusi, and Alapapa from Fausaga, though the list of leading speakers comprises more than these three.
- (d) Groups of ceremonial 'families' (*'aiga*). All the *ali'i* of Fusi, Fausaga, Tafitoala, and Mulivai with the exception of four *ali'i* from Fusi are called *tapa'au o le alataua*. They are ceremonially accorded respect by the *tulafale* of the *alataua*. The *ali'i* of the other five communities and four *ali'i* from Fusi belong to the great ceremonial 'family' (*'aiga*) Sa Tunumafono.
- (e) The highest-ranking *ali'i*. There is not simply one highest-ranking *matai* in Safata (*i Safata e leai se ali'i e to' atasi e maualuga*), but there are four heirs (*suli*) of Tunumafono, the eponymous ancestor of the ceremonial '*aiga* Sa Tunumafono. These four *suli* are accorded highest rank in Safata. Their titles are: 'Anapu (Sa'anapu), Taao (Sataoa), Afemata (Sataoa), and Tuia (Vaie'e). They are called the 'house of four' (*falefa*) of the '*aiga* Sa Tunumafono. Note that their rank does not entail any administrative authority concerning the internal affairs of other communities and '*aiga* of Safata. Legislative and executive power rests ultimately with the community council (*fono*) concerned. The rank of these *ali'i*, as well as that of the *tulafale* mentioned above entails precisely circumscribed ceremonial duties only in matters concerning the whole of Safata.
- (f) The ceremonial figurehead (*fa'auluuluga*) of the '*aiga* Sa Tunumafono. Toleafoa is an *ali'i* of Fausaga whose ceremonial rôle is to act as leader (*sa'o*)

<i>Sa'o'aumaga</i>	<div>△ Toleatfoa</div>									
High-ranking <i>ali'i</i>	<div><div>△ 'Anapu</div><div>△ Taoa</div><div>△ Atemata</div><div>△ Tuliā</div></div>									
Groups of ceremonial families ('āiga) of <i>ali'i</i>	<div><div>Sā Tunamafono</div><div>4 <i>ali'i</i> Sā Tunamafono</div><div><i>Tapa'au o le alataua</i></div></div>									
Leading speakers ( <i>tulafale taua</i> )	<div><div>△ Faleafulugogo</div><div>△ Soalaupule Alapapa</div></div>									
House of speakers ( <i>faleupolu</i> )	<div><div><i>Faletolu</i></div><div><i>Alataua</i></div></div>									
Organizations of untitled men ( <i>auluma o tane</i> )	<div><div>△ Logona (<i>Sa'o aualuma o tane</i>)</div><div>△ Maugana'i (<i>sa'o aualuma o tane</i>)</div></div>									
Communities ( <i>nu'u</i> )	Sa'anapu	Sataoa	Lotofagā	Niusuatia	Vaie'e	Fusi	Fausaga	Tafitoala	Mulivai	

Figure 2.1 Sociopolitical Organization of Safata

of the *'aumaga* of the whole of Safata on occasions of importance. Genealogically, he is the sister's son of Tunumafono. Special rank and respect, therefore, are accorded him when performing as *sa'o 'aumaga*. His rôle in important ceremonies was described to me with the following hypothetical example. Should the Western Samoan Head of State or an equivalent local or foreign dignitary visit Safata, Toleafoa would lead the procession of the *'aumaga* who march in line to welcome the illustrious guest. Note that in this connection *'aumaga* refers to a group of specially nominated untitled men and *matai*; the term normally refers to the workforce of untitled men of a community.

During the reception of the dignitary, Toleafoa would be granted special treatment. His rôle can be compared, with due caution, with that of a president or a king in a Western parliamentary democracy whose rôle, too, is limited to the performance of ceremonial duties. The latter, of course, is head of a simultaneous hierarchy.

There clearly is a hierarchical organization of the suprasystem in Safata. It would be misleading, however, to understand it in terms of a simultaneous hierarchy. Safata's hierarchy of ceremonial rôles does not 'exist' at any given time in the same sense that a simultaneous hierarchy 'exists'. Certain conditions, for example, may require the meeting of the representatives of Safata at a common *fono*. Then only does this hierarchy begin to work. I now outline the events preceding such a *fono*:

- (1) Tuia and Te'o, another high-ranking *ali'i* in Vaie'e, send the *tulafale* Aloali'i (Niusuatia) to Soalaupule (Fusi) to inform him of their wish to convene Safata. If Soalaupule is unavailable, Aloali'i will inform Alapapa in Fausaga.
- (2) Soalaupule or Alapapa send the *tulafale* Mau'ava who is the messenger (*savali*) of the *alataua* to inform the other *tulafale* of the *alataua*. There is a Mau'ava in both Fusi and Fausaga, which reflects parallels in the ceremonial organization of the two communities. Either Fusi or Fausaga should be the venue for the *alataua-speakers*.
- (3) Meanwhile, Aloali'i would proceed from Vaie'e to Sataoa to inform Taoo and Afemata.
- (4) Taoo and Afemata would send Faleafulugogo or any other speaker of the *faletolu* to inform Sa'anapu and Lotofaga.
- (5) If all agree, the venue for the *fono* of Safata will be Vaie'e, except if the election of a new Tuimaleali'ifano is on the agenda. The Tuimaleali'ifano is a high-ranking titleholder in Falelatai, a territory to the west of Safata. In this latter case, the venue will be Sataoa.

I suggest that the hierarchically organized suprasystem of Safata is conceived as a special example of a sequential hierarchy. The idea of applying Johnson's concept to Samoa occurred independently to both van Bakel (1984) and myself

(Bargatzky 1985b, p. 111), although I call it an *occasional ceremonial hierarchy*. In contrast to the sequential hierarchy operative, for example, in !Kung San social organization, Safata's sequential hierarchy operates along ceremonially prescribed lines transmitted by tradition. Of course there is also another fundamental difference between Safata's sequential hierarchy and the sequential hierarchies described by Johnson (1982, 1983). While the basal units of !Kung San society, during rainy seasons, are spatially mobile nuclear families, the basic organizational units of Safata are nine permanent agricultural communities. The number of basal units in Safata, however, is reduced in the context of ceremonial activity, when groups such as the *alataua*, the *faleupolu* of Vaie'e and Niusuatia, and the *faletolu* surface to become active. And while the population of the dry season !Kung San camps disperses during the rainy season and their operational hierarchy 'dissolves', so the OCH of Safata 'dissolves', too, only to be newly enacted next time along ceremonially prescribed lines.

Johnson created the concept of sequential hierarchy to deal with organizational growth in quantitative terms, as a consequence of temporal variation in settlement size. This should not prevent us from trying to generalize his heuristically valuable concept to accommodate it to cases of a different character, such as ceremonial or political activity guided by an occasional hierarchy.

The OCH, however, is not an evolutionary type of society in its own right. Safata's OCH may be no more than the particular Samoan expression of a general process of downward evolution, and any social structure ('band', 'tribe', 'chiefdom', etc.) might become targeted for such processes (Smith 1986, pers. comm.). What kind of society, then, is Safata?

### **Ramifying descent groups in Samoa?**

Samoan social organization is seen by most ethnographers under the heading 'overarching cognatic descent groups' or 'ramages'. A notable exception is Panoff (1964) who stresses the territorial principle regarding Samoan polities. I hold that it is misleading to look at Samoa as still another example of a society governed through the interplay of a number of mutually permeating apical descent groups. This misinterpretation may stem from a neglect of the context-bound meaning of Samoan group terms such as 'aiga'. Samoan political philosophy itself, of course, suggests reading overarching descent groups into the sociopolitical organization. The eponymous ancestor of the people of Safata, for example, is Fata, son of Atiogie and brother of Savea, the first Malietoa (Krämer 1902, p. 233). There is an ideational fiction, too, regarding the common genealogical origin of the *ali'i* of the 'family' Sa Tunumafono in the eponymous ancestor Tunumafono. Stories of this kind and the genealogies collected by Krämer (1902), Pratt (1890), and Bülow (1898), I hold, reflect the *ideational* aspect of a sociopolitical reality that works along *territorial* lines (Bargatzky 1988). Samoans are well aware of the different meanings a group term such as 'aiga' can take relative to the respective

context and it would be fatal for ethnographic interpretation to overlook this fact (Bargatzky 1985b).

Neglect of the polysemic character of the Samoan term '*aiga*', I suggest, may be one of the factors responsible for the debate on the structure of Samoan social organization conducted through a series of articles and rejoinders in which Melvin Ember (1959, 1962a, 1962b, 1963, 1964, 1966), Derek Freeman (1964, 1966), Lowell Holmes (1963), and Marshall Sahlins (1964) took part. At the base of this controversy is the claim made by Sahlins (1958) that there is a fundamental difference in Polynesia between what he called *ramified* and *descent-line* systems of social integration. Ember (1962a, p. 968) picked up the thread and claimed that Samoa lacked a ramifying system of descent lines articulated beyond the local community level. Drawing on the work of Krämer (1902, p. 235) and his own fieldwork data, Freeman retorted that the genealogies of Sa'anapu clearly prove the existence of a ramified descent structure, both at the community and at the supra-community levels.

While Ember correctly emphasized the significance of the local '*aiga*' and noticed the differences between political '*aiga*' and 'family' groups in other parts of Polynesia which may more clearly correspond with the concept of the ramifying, supra-local descent group, his denial of the supra-local character of Samoan political integration was incorrect. It was easy for Freeman to refute Ember's latter claim by referring to the supra-local character of Samoan genealogies. Freeman, however, mistook *genealogies* as evidence for the existence of *descent groups*, in conformity with the kinship idiom still prevalent among anthropologists (Schneider 1984, Bargatzky 1988). To my mind, however, the famous Samoan genealogies are not genealogies referring to persons as real beings, but to persons as *cultural constructs* (cf. Schneider 1967, p. 67). Overarching genealogies, in Samoa, are part of the ceremonial *charter* for the relations between 'districts' and 'subdistricts'. The idiom used by Samoans to express these relations is the *gafa*, the genealogy.

Samoans are aware of this, of course. According to my own investigations, the '*aiga*' Sa Tunumafono, for example, is *not* considered as a family in the biological sense (*e leai se 'aiga i le tino ma le toto*). Inter-marriage is allowed. Sa Tunumafono is considered a family in name only (*na 'o se ta'u*); it is a political, or rather a ceremonial organization of *ali'i* only, and not a ramified descent group, as Freeman (1964, p. 556) claims.

The ramifying descent group, however, is alive and well, at least in anthropologists' minds. Some years ago, Korn (1978) cautioned anthropologists of 'hunting the ramage', but Hjarnø (1979/80, p. 87), for example, portrays Samoan social organization in terms of 'one national segmented structure' with the title 'Tupu o Samoa' at the top of the hierarchy. Apart from the fact that this title was introduced by the missionaries of the London Missionary Society in the 1830s (Bülow 1897, p. 152), I fail to see on what evidence the claim for 'one national segmented structure' may be based. Friedman (1981, 1982), however, relies on Hjarnø when attempting to reconstruct Ekholm's (1977) 'prestige-good systems' in Oceania.

In Safata, too, there is no overarching ramified genealogical structure (*e leai se gafa e tasi i Safata*). Thus Safata cannot be classified as a chiefdom, at least not in the 'classical' sense expounded by Sahlins (1968, p. 24) and Service (1962, 1975).

### Safata: an early state?

The early state is 'an organization for the regulation of social relations in a society that is divided into two emergent social classes, the rulers and the ruled' (Claessen & Skalník 1978c, p. 21). The rulers are entitled to tribute by the ruled, but their relations are legitimized by a common ideology stressing the principle of reciprocity (Claessen & Skalník 1978b, p. 640). What is more, an early state is independent, it exists within a bounded territory, and has a centre of government. Trade and market supplement the subsistence economy. There are full-time specialists and government is represented by full-time functionaries exempted from material production (Claessen & Skalník 1978b, p. 638).

The early state is different from the typologically simpler chiefdom (cf. Service 1975, 15 ff, 151 ff, Claessen & Skalník 1978c, p. 22), though it can be difficult, sometimes, to draw the dividing line between the chiefdom and the early state (cf. Bargatzky 1985a, 300 ff). Fission is one of the key diagnostic features of the chiefdom (cf. Webb 1965, Davenport 1969, Valeri 1972). The state, however, overcomes the fissiparous tendencies inherent in the chiefdom. It has achieved governmental stability within the confines of a territory, but it can become more powerful and more populous by taking in other ethnic groups and extending its borders (cf. Cohen 1973, p. 878, 1978, 35 ff.).

In many respects Safata can qualify as an early state. There are rulers (*matai*) and ruled, there is an emphasis on territorial organization within a bounded territory, it is politically independent, though ceremonially linked to other similarly organized 'subdistricts' of Tuamasaga in matters concerning the paramount title *Malietoa*. Reciprocity still governs the relations between rulers and ruled. There are, however, no full-time specialists, trade and market systems are absent, and government is not represented by full-time functionaries. Political and administrative centralization is most conspicuously lacking. To qualify as an early state, however, there should be more centralization and more political power to enforce decisions in Safata (Claessen, pers. comm.).

Typifying, however, is not an aim in itself. Type concepts should be flexible enough to be modified when new data are available. The early state-concept such as advocated by Claessen, Skalník, and their collaborators (Claessen & Skalník 1978a, 1981) clearly carries with it the notion of simultaneous hierarchy. Why not accommodate the concept to non-chiefdom societies within bounded territories and 'governed' by a sequential hierarchy of the OCH kind?

On the other hand, if we insist upon the simultaneous hierarchical character of an early state, the concept of OCH can be heuristically valuable in the pursuit of evolutionary problems. We might ask, for example, why the decisive characteristics of the early state did not develop in a society such as Safata, or if they did exist there at some point in the past, why they are no longer there.

## Discussion

The arguments so far may be relevant for evolutionary theory and particularly the theory of the evolution of the state. Two general ways of evolution can be discerned (Berrien 1968, 20 ff.): *upward* and *downward*. Upward evolving systems grow through the development of successive supra-systems, whereas downward evolution means growth through the development of nonspecialized, autonomous subsystems. By contrast, subsystems in upward evolving systems initially possess stronger attractive forces and are less easily disrupted during the system's formative stages. Their performance is more effective than the younger suprasystem's performance (cf. Bargatzky 1987).

Subsystem specialization during the process of upward evolution restricts the capacity of the different subsystems to survive on their own. The greater the degree of specialization, the greater is the subsystem's dependence upon the performance of the total system. A total system consisting of a number of specialized subsystems can perform a wider range of activities than any of its subsystems taken separately. Hence, the total system is better equipped than any of its subsystems alone to deal with, say, environmental variability. The supra-system, therefore, has a longer life span than any of its subsystems (cf. Berrien 1968, p. 84).

Growth of the total system during upward evolution, I suggest, reflects the development of a simultaneous hierarchy. The sociopolitical organization of an OCH, by contrast, is an example of downward evolution. Downward evolution is defined as growth within the total system through the development of autonomous subunits among the system's components. The subunits are able to survive on their own, they are not dependent on the performances of a strong supra-system and its simultaneous control hierarchy. If we consider the different communities of Safata, for example, as the components of the sociopolitical *subsystem* of Safata, we can observe the growth of the number of these components. At the end of the last century, Fusi and Fausaga were one community only (cf. Krämer 1902, p. 234). Since then, this community split up into two autonomous *nu'u*; their internal rank orders, however, are partly constructed along parallel lines (cf. Bargatzky 1988).

Because of the split of Fusi-Fausaga into two independent communities, the pattern of mutual ceremonial relations of the different *nu'u* within Safata has become more complex and elaborated, yet each community is completely autonomous in matters of its daily affairs. The suprasystem of Safata exists in the form of an OCH only, it does not exert any of the controls exercised in a more centralized polity governed through a simultaneous hierarchy. This form of downward evolution is familiar to anthropologists under the label 'involution' (cf. Goldenweiser 1937, Geertz 1963). It involves the development of basic forms into patterns of great complexity without the transformation of these patterns into something qualitatively new. In such development the original pattern becomes internally more and more complicated.

Involution, or downward evolution, is an apt formula to describe the relationship between the communities of Safata. The web of relationships is so complicated and so evidently the elaboration of basic Samoan cultural patterns that it takes the form of an OCH because only this type of hierarchy is compatible with the strongly emphasized independence of the Samoan *nu'u*.



How old is the OCH in Samoa? The answer has a bearing on the problem of political evolution in Oceania, and especially Western Polynesia (e.g. Kaeppler 1978). For instance, is there a connection between the decentralized structure of Samoan polities, the centralized structure of Tongan polities, and the Tongan 'invasion' of Samoa in pre-European times (cf. Ella 1899, Krämer 1902, p. 12)? Were the decisive characteristics of the centralized early state once in existence in Samoa, or did they not develop at all, maybe due to the Tongan 'invasion'? This problem can only be tackled if we know more about the historical age of the OCH in Samoa.

The politically decentralized character of Samoan polities at the beginning of European contact is evident from the testimony of the early London Missionary Society missionaries, such as, for example, John Williams in 1830 and 1832 (cf. Moyle 1984, p. 84, 238 ff.), G. Platt (1836), and G. Stallworthy (1854). Moreover, archaeologists seem to agree that the basic settlement pattern of contemporary Samoa has a long history, despite a clear trend towards population dispersal in the centuries before 1830. Archaeological evidence allows the assumption that the Samoan *nu'u* and even the cluster of *nu'u* have a long history (cf. Davidson 1974, p. 161, Holmer 1980, Jennings & Holmer 1980, p. 143, Jennings 1976, p. 98).

The existence of independent communities, archaeologically identified as clusters of *nu'u*, and integrated through an OCH, is compatible with the lack of political centralization in early historic times. The factors involved are well described by Gilson (1970, pp. 57–64), e.g. the dispersal of formal 'lineage' affiliations and the absence of compulsory rules for title succession. Even the highest royal title-holders (*tama 'aiga*) could not claim authority in domestic matters over communities whose 'aiga were ceremonially affiliated to the royal lines in the frame of a 'political family', and there were no closed 'lineage areas'.

Another hint at the possible old age of the OCH in Samoa can be drawn from the field of comparative religion: with all due caution, Cain (1979, pp. 510–12) concludes that the Samoan way of ancestor worship represents a very archaic system when compared with Eastern Polynesian pre-Christian religions focusing on the great Polynesian gods Tangaroa, Tane, Tu, and Rongo. Contrary to these numinous beings, Samoan ancestor-gods (*aitu*) never lost their character as locally and kinship-bound deified ancestors. This absence of a national cult in Samoa agrees well with the lack of Samoan political centralization, but it is compatible with political organization along the lines of an OCH.

Though it is premature to draw any conclusion regarding the presumptive connection between Samoa's decentralized polities and the Tongan 'invasion', it can be concluded, at least, that Samoa's OCHs are not a recent feature of Samoa's history. Polities organized along the lines of an OCH seem to be rather old and to have achieved a high degree of resilience to change of the basic ceremonial configurations.

The question arises whether the OCH is limited to Samoa or whether it also occurs elsewhere. To answer this question would require reanalysis of such ethnographic reports as those on the western Anuak (who were also organized in ceremonially linked villages; cf. Mair 1970, pp. 70–6, 105), on the Alur (Southall 1953, pp. 248–52), or on the inhabitants of the Fox Islands (Aleuts) (whose social organization is reported

to be based on 'chiefdoms' integrating economically self-sufficient coastal villages which were autonomous regarding matters of domestic government; Townsend 1985).

In conclusion, therefore, the OCH is a special kind of sequential hierarchy and the result of a process of downward evolution. Much of what has been previously classified as, for example, 'chiefdoms', due to the paradigm of the simultaneous hierarchy which pervades anthropological thinking (but cf. Smith 1985), may have to be reclassified as OCH. The combined efforts of archaeologists and ethnologists are needed for such reanalysis. OCHs may not be limited to Samoa but may be more widespread than presently realized.

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### Note

- 1 The detailed ethnographic evidence will shortly appear in a book entitled *Die Söhne Tunumafonos. Deszendenz, Metapher und Territorialität am Beispiel der traditionellen politischen organisation Westsamoa's*, and a general monograph on Samoan social organization is to follow at a later date.

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*The Hawaiian transformation of Ancestral  
Polynesian Society: conceptualizing chiefly  
states*

M ATTHEW SPRIGGS

**Introduction**

Hawaii has long been used as an exemplary case in neo-evolutionist theories of cultural change, representing at European contact (1778) the apogee of Polynesian hierarchical social organization. Argument has been joined on whether the various political units encountered by Captain Cook were ‘advanced chiefdoms’ or ‘primitive states’, and the social structure has often been described as ‘feudal’. A lot of effort has been wasted over what I suspect amounts to somewhat sterile typologizing. This chapter is not primarily concerned with ‘definitions’ of this sort.

Despite 35 years of controlled archaeological excavation, the Hawaiian case is still often described in the literature as an ‘ethnographic’ or ‘ethnohistoric’ example, relying on one or two justly famous accounts by 19th century indigenous historians, or worse on secondary and often inaccurate short résumés by Sahlins (1958) and Goldman (1970). In this study reference will be made to the archaeological record as well as to ethnohistoric and linguistic sources, and a summary of the prehistoric sequence given to establish what changed and when. Interpretations advanced by various archaeologists and anthropologists in explanation of this sequence are then examined critically to attempt a better conceptualization of evolutionary process.

Our evidence for what changes in the Hawaiian sequence is of three main kinds: archaeological, ethnohistoric, and linguistic. The archaeological evidence has been well summarized recently by Kirch (1985) and Hommon (1986) and comes mainly from contract archaeology or cultural resource management studies undertaken in response to economic development. I have used the above summary sources freely as well as information from more recent contract reports and ongoing studies. The rich ethnohistoric corpus from Hawaii includes explorers’ accounts from 1778 onwards, the writings of missionaries from after 1820, and traditional histories written down by native Hawaiians from the late 1830s but previously representing an oral tradition. Some important sources are listed by Valeri (1985a, pp. xvii–xxviii). Linguistic or comparative evidence is in the form of lexical reconstructions for aspects of social and economic organization of ‘Ancestral Polynesian Society’ (Kirch 1984, Ch. 3), the base-line from which all Polynesian cultures developed and which existed at about 500 BC in Western Polynesia. Kirch (1984) has combined historical, linguistic, archaeological, and comparative ethnographic evidence to give us a convincing picture

of this culture, aspects of which can be cautiously extrapolated to represent the culture of the initial settlers of Hawaii in the period 100 BC-AD 100. The earliest settlements found in Eastern Polynesia so far are in the Marquesas, dating to the 2nd century BC (Kirch 1984, p. 73). Settlement dates for Hawaii are usually given as AD 400– 600 (or even AD 700) but there is increasing evidence of earlier settlement (Kirch 1985, pp. 82–5, Beggerly in press).

For our purposes the reconstructed aspects of Ancestral Polynesia Society which are most pertinent are those concerning social relations. The senior/ junior distinction was fundamental to the Polynesian ideology of rank and is reflected in distinctions drawn between senior and junior siblings of the same sex reconstructed linguistically. Similarly we can reconstruct a term *\*ariki*, meaning ‘chief, head of a lineage; first born in the senior line, who succeeds to the chieftainship of the lineage and has strong personal “*mana*” and “*tapu*” ’ (Pawley 1979, p. 20, quoted in Kirch 1984, p. 63). This hereditary chiefship was legitimized by an ideology of direct descent from the gods from whom *mana* (loosely, ‘spiritual power’) and *tapu* (state of sacredness) were derived. Ancestral social organization was based on a corporate descent group headed by a chief, called a *\*kainanga*, with *\*kainga* as an extended household together with the land it occupied. Other aspects of the reconstructed social and religious system are discussed by Kirch (1984, pp. 66–7). The first settlers reached Hawaii with this cultural baggage in tow, as well as with a range of oceanic crop plants and the pig, dog, and chicken as domestic animals. There is no reason to believe we are talking of more than one or two canoe-loads of people as the settlers—perhaps 50 people. The Hawaiian language is part of the Marquesic subgroup of the Polynesian languages, and it is probably from the Marquesas Islands, some 3900 kilometres to the south-east, that these initial settlers came.

### **The Hawaiian cultural sequence**

I have chosen to divide the Hawaiian prehistoric sequence into five phases (a variant of the four-phase scheme used by Kirch 1985, pp. 298–308): *Phase I* AD 1–600, the colonization period; *Phase II* AD 600–1100, the developmental period; *Phase III* AD 1100–1400, the early expansion period; *Phase IV* AD 1400–1600, the late expansion period; *Phase V* AD 1600–1795, the classic period. After AD 1795 we enter a period where Hawaii became increasingly a part of the world economic system and the indigenous cultural trajectory became deflected by foreign trade, introduced disease, and capitalist economic relations. The polity was finally overthrown by American imperialism in the last decade of the 19th century with Hawaii’s absorption as a Territory and then later a State of the Union.

Archaeological changes which have been observed over the 1800 years or so of the sequence include changes in settlement and household pattern, distribution of settlement, economic intensification particularly of agriculture and aquaculture, environmental changes both natural and human-induced, and changes in temple (*heiau*) architecture and size. Aspects of rank have been identified from burials and house size (see in particular Cordy 1981) but this evidence is less certain. Traditional histories generally refer to the period from Phase III onwards and are particularly

detailed for Phase V, documenting changes in social and religious practices and warfare. Changes in land tenure and social organization can be inferred by comparing the reconstructed Ancestral Polynesian Culture in Phase I with the situation at European contact towards the end of Phase V, and clues can be sought in the archaeological record as to the timing of these changes.

*Phase I,  
AD 1–600, colonization period*

Sites have generally been found in windward areas where irrigation would have been possible. Most of the major oceanic crops and domestic animals were successfully introduced, and adaptations of material culture made to fit local materials and conditions. Our reconstruction of Ancestral Polynesian Society suggests hereditary chiefship although the rank differences between chiefs and commoners would have been minimal and the small population (perhaps 1000 people at the end of this phase) would have been closely interrelated by kinship ties. Social organization would have been that of corporate descent groups (called by Hommon ‘archaic *maka’ ainana*’).

*Phase II,  
AD 600–1100, developmental period*

In material culture terms a distinctively Hawaiian culture developed during this period. By its end permanent settlement was found scattered along the coasts of all the major islands, generally still in windward areas. Some evidence of rank is provided by an elaborate burial from O’ahu of a female child with an anklet of pig tusks and a neck ornament of a type later associated with chiefly status. Kirch’s projected population of the Islands by AD 1100 is about 20 000 people, although Hommon would argue for a much smaller figure. The total number of sites investigated and areas excavated within them still remains small, preventing further documentation. The earliest references in the traditional histories refer to the very end of this period when the inhabitants were ‘without any political organization beyond the patriarchal, and without kapus—at least of any stringent nature’ (Fornander 1919, vol. VI, p. 252). Temples were described as unwallled, and the general populace participated in rituals. This picture is contrasted in the traditional histories with the later development of a much more stratified social and religious system developing during the succeeding phases.

*Phase III,  
AD 1100–1400, early expansion period*

Between AD 1100 and 1300 a great number of new settlements were established, many of them in previously uninhabited drier leeward areas although in favourable locations such as around natural coastal fishponds or sheltered inlets. In windward



areas where settlement had previously tended to cluster on the coast, perhaps in small nucleated villages, there is evidence of dispersed settlement throughout the interior portions of the valleys. Various sites of this period suggest conversion of some areas from shifting agriculture to irrigated pondfield agriculture, representing agricultural intensification.

From the numbers of new sites, population growth would appear to have been explosive. Kirch's exponential model compared to Hommon's view of more steady growth gives different absolute numbers, but both agree to relatively rapid doubling times for population during this and the succeeding period. The lack of inland settlement and utilization in leeward areas during this period suggests different population dynamics for the windward and leeward sides of islands; high populations in windward valleys and migration into previously unoccupied leeward coastal areas perhaps by a process of group fission.

In traditional histories this is the 'migration period' when two-way voyaging took place between Tahiti and Hawaii bringing new chiefs and new ideas, in particular a new religious system involving human sacrifice and ceremonies in walled temples from which the common people were excluded. There is a greater stress on distinctions of rank and attendant *kapu* separating chiefs and commoners. Several of the major *luakini heiau* (temples of human sacrifice) were said to have been constructed at this time.

No temples of this early date have yet been excavated but 'marae-type' temples of a form suggested by Emory (1928, 1970) to represent the earlier temple architecture have been found on remote Nihoa and Necker Islands and at isolated locations in the main Hawaiian chain. None has been dated so far.

Archaeological evidence in Hawaii for Tahitian contact is at present scant, a fish-hook type and a notched quoit. Archaeologists have tended in the past to play down its importance in reaction to the 'migrationitis' of previous researchers (see for instance Cordy 1974b, Green 1974, Kirch 1985, p. 305). The possible explanatory importance of Hawaiian-Tahitian contact will be returned to later.

It is during this and the next phase that we hear of chiefs of particular traditional districts of islands. As Hommon notes, the boundaries of these districts are usually controlled by uninhabitable mountain ranges or by arid or otherwise unproductive lands. Their boundaries are in some sense 'natural', determined by environmental factors which discouraged settlement. It is in each of these districts that Hommon locates an archaic *maka'ainana*, or corporate descent group formed by fission from the initial settling group. Hommon suggests that day-to-day interaction would tend to be within the district. By the end of Phase III there was settlement in all major districts and further fissioning into independent political units was no longer possible for segments of the descent groups. The archaeological evidence for the existence of these independent districts is essentially negative: the lack of settlement in boundary areas before about AD 1500–1600 after which boundaries in settlement distribution tend to disappear.

*Phase IV,  
AD 1400–1600, late expansion period*

This phase (Hommon's Phase II) is defined most strikingly by the development of large-scale permanent agricultural field complexes in the inland areas of the leeward sides of the islands. Three field systems have been investigated on Hawai'i Island. Although never fully mapped, the most southerly of these, the Kona field system, covers over 139 square kilometres and the northern Kohala field system covers about 57 square kilometres. The fields were utilized for growing a range of crops depending on soil depth and rainfall, including taro and sweet potato, grown by an intensified form of shifting cultivation with supplemental irrigation at higher elevations where suitable water sources could be found. The development of these systems represents an 'inland expansion' in that often their lower altitudinal limits are some kilometres inland, separated from coastal settlements by an arid, barren zone of nearly bare lava. Large areas of these field systems came into use during Phase IV and represent a major expansion and intensification of the leeward production systems. Similar inland expansion is found in leeward areas of other islands such as in Makaha Valley, O'ahu. This phase represents forest clearance on a massive scale.

Population continued to grow rapidly during this phase and according to Kirch's simulation could have reached about 200 000 by AD 1600. According to Hommon it is the inland expansion which marks the breakdown of the archaic *maka'ainana* and the development of the historically described *ahupua'a* system. *Ahupua'a* formed the primary social and economic sphere of the local community at European contact, usually consisting of long, narrow land divisions stretching from the coast several kilometres inland and typically cutting across various ecological zones which parallel the coast at varying altitudes. They thus allowed a degree of self-sufficiency to their inhabitants who had access to the products both of the sea and the mountain forests. The earlier coastal orientation and relatively small populations precluded *ahupua'a* development before about AD 1400–1500, although they may have been forming already in heavily populated windward areas. Hommon suggests a reduction in inter-community contacts in this period and the growth of local populations leading to eligible marriage partners being available within the local community. A high degree of *ahupua'a* commoner endogamy seems to have been the case at contact. Initially the inland agricultural areas would have been considered part of the archaic *maka'ainana* but over time division and subdivision (presumably politically controlled) of the lands within the district resulted in there being between about 30 and 100 *ahupua'a* per district. Subdivision of *ahupua'a* was a continuing process into the Early Historic period, making the land divisions sometimes extremely narrow, as in the Kona district of Hawai'i Island.

Many fishponds were constructed during this phase. None has been dated archaeologically but genealogies of chiefs associated with the building of ponds suggest the 15th century as a major period of construction. The ponds converted coastal reef flats into aquaculture devices yielding many hundreds of kilos of fish per hectare, a major intensification of production apparently directly under chiefly control. The

largest ponds were over 200 hectares in size and over 400 had been constructed in the Islands before AD 1830.

Very few temple sites have been excavated, but a large inland agricultural temple in Makaha Valley, O'ahu, was originally constructed in the 15th century and a smaller temple of similar type dating to about the same period has been excavated recently in leeward Maunaloa on O'ahu.

Cordy (1981) has used traditional history and dates for the settlement of boundary areas between districts to suggest that multidistrict political units at times representing the unification of whole islands first came into being during this phase, to be consolidated during Phase V. Thus the first paramount chief of O'ahu was said to be Kapaekalokona who should date to about AD 1440; Hawai'i Island was perhaps first united by Kalaunuihewa in about AD 1480 and certainly by the time of Kihanuululumoko at about AD 1560. Maui was divided into two multidistrict polities centred on Wailuku and Hana perhaps as far back as AD 1340 and certainly by AD 1500. The island was united by Pi'ilani in about AD 1600. Kaua'i's first paramount, Ahukiniala'a, reigned about AD 1420.

*Phase V,  
AD 1600–1795 the classic period*

The traditional histories are most detailed for this period (Hommon's Phase III) and all the evidence points to the pattern of Hawaiian culture recorded by Cook and other early explorers as being well established by about AD 1600. By this time the continued development of inland agricultural complexes was accompanied by a significant increase in the use of the most agriculturally marginal areas of the Islands such as the north Kona coast of Hawai'i Island, the Barbers Point area of O'ahu (both boundary areas between districts), and the island of Kaho'olawe which is in the rainshadow of the Maui mountains. Population probably continued to increase, although at a reduced rate, reaching perhaps somewhere between 250 000 and 400 000 by the time of European contact.

Hommon has noted that in Hawaii, as elsewhere in the tropics, areas with low rainfall also have an unpredictable pattern of rainfall and therefore often tend to experience periods of severe drought. Thus by the beginning of Phase V many Hawaiians were dependent on the agricultural production of environmentally unpredictable areas which constitute a significant percentage of the leeward sides of all Islands. Serious droughts and attendant famines are recorded in the histories of this period.

Traditional accounts from the beginning of this period are the first to refer to the expansion of political boundaries and succession to the rank of paramount chief by military force. Campaigns extended beyond individual islands culminating in 1795 with the unification of much of the Hawaiian archipelago by Kamehameha. In Kona (Hawai'i) all of the fortified refuge caves so far investigated have their refuge phase dated to after AD 1500–1600 (Schilt 1984, p. 294). In Phase V there is a constantly repeated story of political expansion through conquest warfare, often with subsequent temporary disintegration of these new polities but with a general tendency for ever-larger political units over time.

Human sacrifice temples (*luakini heiau*) were critical in propitiating the war gods and several of the largest of these date to this phase. Kane'aki Heiau in Makaha Valley, O'ahu, was converted about AD 1650 from an agricultural to a war *luakini heiau*. Although chiefs and commoners were notionally related by kinship bonds, demonstrable links had disappeared and indeed commoners were forbidden to keep genealogies; the chiefs had in effect become an endogamous class. Inter-island chiefly marriage links became common, as did the incestuous unions of high chiefs. Starting traditionally with 'Umi, the Paramount of Hawai'i in about AD 1600, land was redistributed to chiefly followers (as *konohiki* or land managers) after conquest and on the death of the previous ruler, at the district and even down to the *ahupua'a* level (Stokes 1932, p. 14). Because of repeated conquests the *ahupua'a* chief was likely at any one time to be an outsider unrelated to the commoners under him. The corporate archaic *maka'ainana* had broken down and with it the genealogical link between chief and commoners was lost, as was the commoners' title to the land they tilled. This can be seen by the transformation in meaning of the Ancestral Polynesian terms for descent groups with their land: *\*kainanga* (*\*matakainanga* in Eastern Polynesia) and *\*kainga*. *Maka'ainana* in Hawaii came to refer to commoners as a class as opposed to chiefs and *'aina* no longer meant an extended household and its land, but simply 'land'.

By European contact commoners were no longer organized in the old Polynesian conical clan claiming descent from a common ancestor but formed bilateral kindreds with shallow genealogical depth. Commoners were effectively tenants on the lands of non-local chiefs and could be dispossessed if they failed to pay tribute or contribute to corvée labour, although this does not appear to have happened often in pre-contact times and commoners continued to inherit use rights to the land from their ancestors (Linnekin 1984, p. 170–3). What had started in Ancestral Polynesian Society as first-fruits offerings to the gods, mediated by chiefly ritual intercession on the group's behalf had become by Phase V at least *de facto* tribute or tithe collection by the chiefs to support themselves and their governmental apparatus of ritual and craft specialists and administrators. The expansion of agriculture into leeward areas would have led to unpredictable fluctuations in the generally increasing chiefly revenues. In traditional histories the reasons for conquest warfare are often given as a desire to increase the amount of tribute supplied to the government. In such warfare the prizes were whole districts or even islands and their populations.

When Captain Cook arrived in Hawaii in 1778–79, the islands were divided into four independent political units: Kaua'i and Ni'ihau ruled by a close relative of Peleioholani, the paramount of O'ahu; O'ahu and probably Moloka'i ruled by Peleioholani; most of Maui, Lana'i, and Kaho'olawe ruled by Kahekili; and Hawai'i and part of East Maui ruled by Kalaniopu'u. Seven years later during the next visit by Europeans the political situation was quite changed with Hawai'i Island divided now into three political units, and Kahekili now in control of all of Maui, O'ahu, and Moloka'i as well as Lana'i and Kaho'olawe. Through his relatives he also had some control of the affairs of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau. The next ten years saw the conquest of all the islands except Kaua'i and Ni'ihau by Kamehameha of Hawai'i Island but by this time European firearms had seriously changed the balance of power.

### Interpretations of the Hawaiian sequence

Long before the above prehistoric sequence had been constructed there was a two-phase culture sequence for Hawaii based on interpretations of the traditional histories by 19th century scholars such as Fornander who believed that the culture of the original Polynesian settlers had been replaced by that of new immigrants from Tahiti during the 'migration period' of about AD 1100– 1300. The two 'waves' of migrants had introduced different cultural traits (see Howard 1967 for an excellent survey of early views on Polynesian origins and migrations). Archaeological surveys began in Hawaii in the early 1900s, with scientific excavations starting in the 1950s. It was not until the early to mid 1970s, however, that enough research had been conducted on the various islands to allow the presentation of general cultural sequences and their interpretation. Meanwhile, both Sahlins (1958) and Goldman (1970) had offered their views of the 'engines' of culture change in the Pacific, one from an adaptationist point of view and the other from a sociological perspective invoking aspects of Polynesian social organization which generated status rivalry between chiefly lines giving the dynamic to culture change. Hearing of the Hawaiian irrigation systems, Wittfogel (1957, p. 241) had inevitably included Hawaii in his category of 'crude, agrobureaucratic states'.

The earliest strictly archaeological interpretations of Hawaiian culture change were heavily biased towards adaptationist and/or cultural materialist explanations, with population increase being a critical variable (Cordy 1974a, p. 89). Cordy follows Harner in seeing 'full-land' as causing population pressure and also allows for Carneiro's 'social circumscription'. The postulated results are agricultural intensification (cf. Boserup 1965), war for land, and/or social organizational changes. Kirch (1980, p. 47) produced a model along similar lines where social stratification is seen as 'the outcome of adaptive response to certain problems posed by situations of density dependent selection in circumscribed island ecosystems'.

Subsequently writers have taken a systems theory approach although still rooted within a functionalist tradition. This is exemplified by the work of Hommon (1976) and Kirch (1982). In these models population growth and pressure have important rôles in culture change but not as wholly independent variables: 'Population growth is viewed here as an important phenomenon that interacted with the natural environment, agricultural technology and social and political organization in a systemic fashion' (Hommon 1976, p. 250).

The inland expansion caused by one or all of these factors led to a coastal inland economic orientation rather than the previous orientation of communities along the coast and so *ahupua'a* self-sufficiency and a tendency to endogamy developed. The *ahupua'a* thus replaced the archaic *maka' ainana*. These processes were 'paralleled by a widening of the gap between chief and commoner as the concept of kinship centered increasingly within the local community. The practice of hypergamy for preservation of rank reinforcing endogamy within the *ali'i* as a social stratum also hastened the formation of socioeconomic classes' (Hommon 1976, p. 231). Based on the archaeological evidence available at the time Hommon postulated that population

growth was significantly reduced in the first half of the 17th century, indeed that the population stabilized or declined prior to European contact. His explanation was essentially a carrying capacity one—the agricultural system had expanded to its limits, exacerbated by droughts in leeward areas. The prestige and power of chiefs was funded by the goods and services produced by commoners and so a reduction in these goods was a threat to chiefly power. Territorial acquisition would be the main avenue for increasing the goods available to the chiefly hierarchy, hence the records of conquest warfare in Phase V (Hommon 1976, Ch. II).

The problem with this model and Hommon's revised version (1986) (on a theoretical rather than empirical level) is in the vagueness of the links between the changes occurring. It is never specified why *ahupua'a* development should lead to or be associated with class formation and there is no stated dynamic of increasing chiefly power unless it simply be a link with increasing population. Similar problems occur with Kirch's 1982 model. Again relevant factors for an explanation of cultural change are listed in a 'kitchen sink' model but their articulation is never specified. Underlying everything is the inexorable engine of population growth, seen as rapid in Hawaii because of lack of environmental constraints in the early phases of settlement (Kirch 1982, p. 86). The model also incorporates circumscription of land, warfare, and cybernetic regulation of production. Mentioned as relevant variables but not explicitly incorporated are, 'the structural proclivities of Polynesian societies themselves (e.g. emphasis on segementation, importance of redistribution, etc.)' (Kirch 1982, p. 87).

Earle's (1978) contribution to theories of social stratification comes from its explicit consideration of such 'structural proclivities' of Polynesian social organization and here he builds extensively on Goldman's (1970) work. He examines and rejects the 'ecological' theories of Service, Wittfogel, and Carneiro (Earle 1978, p. 4) in order, like Goldman, to construct a nonfunctionalist model of social stratification:

it is necessary to understand the internal organization of a culture in addition to its adaptation...the factors responsible for evolutionary development were inherent in Polynesian social organization; the degree to which the various Polynesian societies actually developed was determined by the particular attributes of their island environments (Earle 1978, p. 196).

These inherent factors are what Goldman had identified as the 'dynamic' of Polynesian chiefly systems and include the contradiction between status being determined on the basis of genealogical rank and associated religious sanctity versus a competitive process (fuelled by ambiguities in the kinship structure) determining status on the basis of operational power (Earle 1978, p. 171). Competition or status rivalry is thus to Goldman and Earle an inherent feature of Polynesian sociopolitical structure. Earle draws two implications: first, competition is divisive, and secondly competition is financed by economic intensification. Goods mobilized by this intensification supported the chiefs, established and maintained political relationships and led to 'capital investment' in irrigation systems (as 'a strategy to increase local population as a means to increase surplus production') and in warfare in order to seize new means of

production, especially population (Earle 1978, pp. 180–5). An expansionistic dynamic is thus established.

The appeal of the Goldman/Earle formulation is in its vision of societies' members as agents actively shaping social systems rather than simply reacting to them. Lack of specificity of process, however, is a problem with this approach as Howard has pointed out: 'Instead of offering a model of causation, Goldman describes a general direction and offers a loosely defined set of principles that he sees involved in social transition' (Howard 1972, p. 821).

Kirch (1984, p. 8) directly eschews development of any specific model of Polynesian cultural change, expressing scepticism that any single paradigm can adequately explain social transformation. The message appears to be that everything is related to everything else in a situation of mutual feedback. Thus:

Population growth, limited agricultural resources, chiefly demand for surplus and a consequent need for territorial expansion were clearly fundamental to the larger process. Environmental change—both stochastic perturbations and longer-term degradation induced by human land use—also had a rôle.... Just as significant a variable in the process of war were Ancestral Polynesian social and political relations, including cultural definitions of *mana* and status.... In these struggles for power, legitimated by myth and past actions, we see the evolution of island chiefdoms (Kirch 1984, p. 216).

Kirch and Hommon between them have probably identified most of, if not all, the relevant variables for a synthetic model of Hawaiian cultural change, but explanation remains on an abstract and overgeneralized level. As Friedman & Rowlands (1977, p. 267) have said of similar multivariate models:

Since they are normally restricted to such abstract categories as population size and density, technological organization, trade, warfare, they are not specific enough to account for the actual transition from one social form to another.... It is the integration of the above categories in a social formation which determines their specific effectivity.

Their own model of the transformation of a certain kind of tribal social structure over time into a conical clan chiefdom then an 'Asiatic' state has a great deal of relevance to the Hawaiian case. Friedman (1981) has applied their general model to the Polynesian area. Noting a difference at European contact between Western and Eastern Polynesian social structure, he suggests the former as an earlier form and sketches a transformation from one into the other:

The disappearance of the prestige-good system [of Western Polynesia] may be generally related to the quantum increase in distance between island groups. The loss of monopolistic control of exchange must have led to

increased competition, the increase in competitive feasting and warfare. This in itself would have led to a rapid intensification of agricultural production. In such a situation it is likely that the alliance system would break down since it was held together by the flow of valuables. In the absence of monopolies, marriage strategies will tend towards endogamy combined with selective alliances with distant lines of at least equal rank. Genealogically based hierarchies could easily be overturned by warfare and conquest.

...The same changes in the conditions of social reproduction lead to an amplification of chiefly sacredness, a multiplication of tabus and severe punishment for 'wrong doers'. When the prestige-good system breaks down, the entire power structure becomes increasingly dependent upon the theocratic aspect of the system, i.e. the material force of supernatural dictates (1981, pp. 288–9).

### **A revised Hawaiian model**

In constructing a Hawaii-specific model of social transformation we need to draw on the theories discussed above and seek to articulate the disparate strands of causation others have isolated. Our starting point is the structure of Ancestral Polynesian Society as discussed by Kirch (1984, pp. 53–67) and further elucidated by Thomas (1986b). In this the chief was central to the perceptions and the actuality of political and economic organization. He had ritual centrality in society because of his monopolization of rituals to do with societal reproduction. His position was fixed through genealogical rank on the basis of successive primogeniture back to ancestor deities. The essential rôle of the chief in ensuring prosperity was conducive to his general ownership over everything as everyone was indebted to the chief for their continued survival. Offerings were thus given to him, not gifts to be reciprocated. As we start from this basic position of (in Thomas's words) 'hierarchical chiefly encompassment' we do not need to ask how it arose that the chief was believed to be essential in this rôle, we need only note that this ideology persisted in Hawaii. The question 'why chiefs?' never seriously arose as discourse in the Hawaiian context, until posed by Euro-Americans with a different belief system. We could say that there was no developed class consciousness. In some other parts of Polynesia, however, the question did arise as Thomas (1986b, Ch. 8) demonstrates for the Marquesas where chiefly efficacy was challenged by declining conditions of production and chiefly power was seriously undermined. Easter Island is another famous case (McCoy 1979, pp. 159–61).

Although the idea of chiefship was not challenged, the ambiguities of the kinship system and the nature of the conical clan in its opposition of senior and junior lines did lead to the question of 'why this particular chief?' A conical clan has the inherent tendency to decentralize into independent segments because of primogeniture pushing out younger sons. In the earlier phases of settlement such segmentation was possible and could have led to the formation of the cores of the later districts as independent archaic *maka'ainana*. By Phase III the coastline of the islands was already settled



except for economically marginal areas and this option was no longer possible. The system's 'safety valve' had now disappeared. Junior lines faced a situation of looking forward to less and less power as the descent lines ramified, and therefore would have no interest in preserving the rights of the senior line. Succession thus became 'open', primogeniture was in effect divorced from succession to chiefship and attempted usurpation by junior lines became a feature of Hawaiian politics. Competition for chiefly power is a feature of traditions from Phase III onwards, not coincidentally the time of 'Tahitian migrations' and stranger-kings. For references to Hawaiian-Tahitian contacts and their effects, see Cartwright (1933), Fornander (1969), Johnson (1979), references in Sahlins (1981, pp. 10–11, 25–6), and Stokes (1928). I reject the idea that these traditions merely rehearse the common Polynesian belief that power comes from outside society rather than record actual historical events. Although somewhat mythologized, the Hawaiian traditions seem far too material to sustain such an interpretation.

While Hawaiian-Tahitian contact seems well established in the traditions, as Cordy noted (1974b, p. 71) 'this is not an explanation for change but only a description. Why the migrants were successful in establishing their culture must be included in the hypothesis...'. Goldman (1970, p. 211) sees Tahitian influence as 'a stimulus but not a new direction'. Contact with Tahiti can in fact be seen as providing a structural excuse for transforming the ancestral system. Tuggle (1979, p. 189) has opined that traditions of Tahitian migrations and attendant changes in the religious system sound 'suspiciously like external justification for internal consolidation of élite power'. Just so, which is why a few voyagers had such importance for Hawaiian prehistory.

As Earle has pointed out, a characteristic of the more 'open' form of chiefship, 'is competition for limited and economically advantageous social positions. As an outgrowth of this competition, the political economy of the élites is based on maximization of income and to do this, a paramount chief could either intensify production within his chiefdom or expand his chiefdom militarily to include more local communities' (Earle 1978, pp. 183–4). In such a situation, population increase is encouraged as more producers (and soldiers) means more potential for surplus accumulation for the chiefs (cf. Earle 1978, pp. 180–5). Evidence of inland expansion, intensification, and population increase is all there in the archaeological record for the latter parts of Phase III and for Phase IV.

A specific mechanism for class formation and commoner disenfranchisement, however, needs to be provided. Earle notes that limits to expansion are environmental, but they are also a function of social relations. They depend on the amount of work one section of the community (in this case the chiefs) can pressure another into doing (cf. Spriggs 1986, p. 13). Two linked possibilities suggest themselves here. The first is that in a situation of rapid population increase, agricultural expansion did not (at least initially) represent an increasing labour burden to the commoners while providing ever larger surpluses, and therefore there was no breach in the ideology of hierarchical chiefly encompassment:

...the increasing surplus linked to successful intensification accentuates the verticalization process whereby wealth appears to be the result of the

supernatural power of the chiefly ancestors and their descendants. In this way the status of aristocratic lines is raised and their 'economic' importance is increased.... Necessary ritual functions logically entitle aristocrats to a share of the surplus product (Friedman & Rowlands 1977, p. 127).

Secondly, legitimation for increasing surplus extraction was provided by the new religion introduced (or excused) by Hawaiian-Tahitian contact which excluded commoners from worship in the major temples, instituted human sacrifice rituals, and broadened the *kapu* of chiefs and their rights *vis-à-vis* commoners. One could even argue that a 'legitimation crisis' (cf. Habermas 1975) of increased chiefly power had been overcome by the structural excuse of this introduced belief system. What Sahlins has called the deinstitutionalization or deinstitutionalization of the Hawaiian local lineage follows from the legitimation provided by this ideology and the results of successful conquest warfare in Phases IV and V. As districts were conquered as part of chiefly competition, land as one of the spoils of war was redistributed to the ruling chiefs' followers who were set down as *konohiki* over the commoners. Local lineages were thus effectively 'decapitated', local chiefs replaced by outsiders. As political fortunes and polities waxed and waned, grew and fissioned again, the process would be continually repeated especially after it became customary on the accession of a new ruling chief for him to redistribute *all his lands* to his supporters. Chiefs thus became increasingly distanced from commoners. The latter were excluded from the agricultural and other rituals upon which they depended, a strategy of chiefly hypergamy to gain rank led to chiefs becoming essentially an endogamous class, and with the 'decapitation' of the local lineage by political fiat former kinship links between commoners and local chiefs were severed (cf. Friedman & Rowlands 1977, p. 218).

Ralston (1984, p. 24) suggests what the benefits were that might have been perceived by the commoners:

the ruling élite gave them land usage rights, provided the supervisory skills for large communal activities, offered security and justice and, of paramount importance, had the religious connexions and knowledge to ensure the well-being of society.

An alternative or complementary viewpoint can come from analogy with Gilman's (1981) polemical analysis of the development of stratification in Bronze-Age Europe. He rejected views similar to Ralston's that there could be any advantage to commoners in increasing social stratification. His alternative perspective was posed as a question: 'In spite of the fact that their actions do not serve common interests, how do élites establish and maintain their control?' (Gilman 1981, p. 4). He sees the answer (1981, p. 7) in terms of people's 'investment' in capital-intensive subsistence technologies (irrigation systems, terraces, and so on):

The investments of labour to ensure future production would have to be defended. But the value of these same assets would dampen the potential for social fission, so that it would be difficult to check the aspirations of those to whom the defense had been entrusted. In the face of a protector whose exactions seem excessive, the household's choices are limited: it may abandon the asset for which it sought protection; it may find another protector (who may prove no less self-aggrandizing than his predecessor); or it may submit to the excessive exactions. Over the long term these options consistently favor the protectors.

In some reviews of Gilman's paper, his view was described as social stratification through gangsterism, beautifully summed up by Lewthwaite's dictum '*ex mafia dux*'! Gilman in his reply, took the bull by the horns in quoting Moore's view of European feudalism: 'Gangsterism is likely to crop up wherever the forces of law and order are weak. European feudalism was mainly gangsterism that had become society itself and acquired respectability through notions of chivalry' (Moore 1966, p. 214). The link to Hawaii is precisely that its social structure in late prehistory has often been described as feudal, most recently by Valeri (1985b) who seems very much to stress 'gangsterish' elements in his discussion. The middle ground on this issue would have inequality as maintained not simply through ideology or force, but also through a structuring of institutions or relations such that, in at least the short term, it is in the subordinates' interests to remain subordinate (Thomas 1986a, Ch. 4). Given that Hawaii was a regional system, militarization in one district would certainly have immediate effects in others and increasing subordination to chiefs as war leaders may have been the only effective way for a particular polity to survive in that context.

This is not to say commoners were powerless. As the Hawaiian historian Malo wrote in about 1840 'Many kings have been put to death by the people because of their oppression of the *maka' ainana*' (Malo 1951, p. 195). One of the responses allowed by Gilman was for the people 'to find another protector' and this is what often happened. Commoner revolts were fomented and led by junior branches of the chiefly lines, often younger brothers of the ruling chief, when chiefly surplus extraction and general oppression became too much. But the chief was always replaced by another chief—the *system* was never challenged.

### Conclusions

The revised model of the Hawaiian transformation of Ancestral Polynesian Society which has been presented would appear to be consonant with the archaeological evidence which has so far been accumulated, and obviously has many further implications for archaeological testing and ethnohistoric research. A general discussion of this kind, however, is not the place to develop the necessary research strategies.

Building on the theoretical and empirical base provided by past researchers (particularly Hommon and Kirch) I have tried to construct a model which better articulates the disparate strands of causation which have been identified. My major departure from previous recent formulations has been in attempting to bring out the critical importance of Hawaiian-Tahitian contact, while still arguing for an essentially internal generation of change in Hawaiian culture into which framework culture contact must be fitted. With Earle, I see the dynamic as essentially generated by the structure of the founding culture itself in a generally favourable natural environment. I do not place the same amount of importance as Hommon and Kirch do on instability or deteriorating conditions of production caused by the system coming up against its technoenvironmental limits.

Whether Hawaii at contact consisted of a series of highly stratified chiefdoms, or small 'Asiatic' or even 'feudal' states, it has often had a rôle in discussions of the development of complex societies and cultural evolution in general. Does it really have a place as exemplar in such general schemes? Only if one major fact is remembered: the Hawaiian archipelago is the most isolated set of inhabited islands in the world. No other societies which are claimed to be states developed outside of regular contact with other 'proto-states' or other societies with which they traded or which they turned into 'peripheries' to their 'core'. In its isolation Hawaii perhaps represents a unique ideal type, a real '*isolierte Staat*'.

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THE DYNAMICS OF STATE  
FORMATION: FORMATION  
PROCESSES, CUMULATIVE AND  
UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT,  
DEVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE





*State formation and uneven development*

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State formation is a continuing process that involves the creation of class-based production, distribution, circulation, and consumption patterns (Gailey 1985b, Patterson 1985). The process is not a homogeneous one; the societies incorporated into a state do not entirely share the social, political, economic, and cultural forms of the ruling class or dominant society. State formation as a process encapsulates subject peoples; they are not uniformly stratified and show a diversity of relations of property, work, and distribution. In addition, non-subject peoples on the frontiers of the state or beyond are affected by the process in an indirect manner, but nevertheless must change in response to the class-based stratification in the neighbouring society. In other words, the impact of the emergence of class relations and institutions of extraction affects societies on the peripheries of the state. State formation, in effect, creates border peoples, whose internal relations of property and production are altered because of their proximity to a more stratified society (Patterson 1987, in press)<sup>1</sup>.

In Marxist terms, the process of state formation involves the articulation of various forms of communal and tribute-based modes of production. A mode of production is an abstract concept that expresses the relationships between the organization of property and work, on the one hand, and the material conditions in which production takes place, on the other. At the same time, it also describes the political and cultural expressions of these social and economic relations. Modes of production are always manifested in historically specific social formations—i.e. societies in the process of emerging and changing.

Marxists have conceptualized a relatively small number of modes of production (Hobsbawm 1965). Modes of production exist in dialectical relationships with one another. In other words, they interact in specific historical circumstances, mutually shaping and transforming the form and structure of each other. Articulation is one form of linkage. This concept, introduced by Louis Althusser (1969, pp. 87–128), refers to the forcible interrelation of different and potentially even opposed labour forms, production priorities, and means of distribution in a context of political domination. In social formations that include states, modes of production are always articulated, under the domination of one associated with political rulership. The reproduction of the entire class structure, then, is social reproduction. This process includes not only the reproduction of the labour force through birth or acquisition, but also maintenance

activities, socialization, and the replication of the ideological and political means of ensuring the continuation of class domination.<sup>2</sup>

*Uneven development* as a concept emerged to describe the relations created with capitalist expansion and industrialization in colonial and neo-colonial settings (Amin 1976). As a process, it results from the juxtaposition and articulation of peoples with different relations of production and social reproduction within a dominant state and political economy, which is not necessarily a global or world system. It describes the different priorities created when opposed spheres of production emerge. For instance, in many neocolonial countries, a sphere of production for national and international markets exists alongside and in opposition to a sphere oriented towards subsistence production. In such settings, divisions may occur even within peasant communities organized toward subsistence production between those whose efforts are directed primarily towards food crops and those engaged in cash cropping; this division may be echoed in regional élites between those oriented toward national markets and those whose wealth is dependent on international markets. State-sponsored production priorities will face co-operation or resistance from these shifting regional class alignments (Parrish 1986).

In pre-capitalist societies, the spheres of production can be described as civilor state-oriented and kin- or subsistence-oriented (Diamond 1951, 1974). These antagonistic but politically integrated spheres of production emerge with state formations. They create regional differences in how production and reproduction are organized. In other words, uneven development can be discerned in all pre-capitalist social formations that include states.

Pre-capitalist states are based primarily on the extraction of tribute in various forms, i.e. goods or labour, from conquered or otherwise annexed subject peoples. Within pre-capitalist state societies, the form of tribute extraction will alter the structures of social, political, and economic relations within the formerly autonomous kin communities. Tribute extraction also shapes the relations between encapsulated kin communities and the dominant classes. These structures of extraction, both within and outside a given community, cross, merge, and interlock in various combinations. The resultant class structures, then, are extremely complex; the forms of social reproduction and resistance to it will be embedded in a range of contradictory cultural, political, economic, and social relations.

This means that state formation involves the articulation of different modes of production. Articulation can lead to the replacement of one mode of production or the transformation of one into another. What we propose to do is to examine both the distinctive features of tribute-based states and their articulation with various forms of the communal mode of production. In this chapter we want to provide a framework for analysing the effects of increasing stratification and threats of conquest on kin-based societies adjacent to the emerging state. Too little attention has been paid to state formation as a process that calls into question the continuity of kin-based societies on the margins of states.

### Tribute-based states

State formation is a historical process that is not necessarily uni-directional (Gailey 1985b). If we examine any particular social formation that involves a state society, there are analytical categories that may be useful. At any given time, in social formations based on tribute extraction, for example, the relative strength of the kin-based producing communities limits the amount and types of tribute that can be extracted. For that reason, our analytical categories are defined from the perspective of the kin communities.

Tribute-based states support a dominant, non-productive class or classes as well as the apparatus of rulership by extracting labour or products from communities that remain predominantly kin-organized. In tribute-based states, the land and other subsistence resources may be claimed by the state or the ruler as the personification of the state, and the kin-based communities face threats to their continuity if they do not provide goods or services in the form of tax-rents. In practice, the kin communities retain control over most of the use of their lands and subsistence resources; they typically organize the work involved in subsistence production and local reproduction through customary means.

In some instances, the state and its associated classes are able to extract tribute consistently and to specify what goods will be produced as tribute and what services will be provided. In such cases also, the state may intervene directly in the organization of the subsistence sector and the reproduction of local communities. We refer to these instances as *strong tribute-based states*. A classic example is the Inca state after the emergence of Pachakuti 'Inka Yupanki as a political figure in the 1430s (Patterson 1985, 1987, Schaedel 1978).

In other instances, tribute-based states are unable to determine in a consistent manner what labour or products will be extracted from subject populations. In addition, such states do not have the power to intervene effectively in subsistence pursuits or local reproduction. In other words, the kin communities are effective in retaining greater control over their lands and labour potential and, therefore, can offer greater resistance to the incursion of state agents and processes. We refer to these instances as *weak tribute-based states*. The Shan states of highland Burma fit this description (Leach 1964).

When a state apparatus, whether strong or weak collapses, the mode of production may take a different form, namely, feudalism, which we consider as one variant of the tributary mode of production (cf. Amin 1980, pp. 46–70). In *feudal states*, tribute extraction occurs as a decentralized form of tax-rent paid in either labour service, products, or money (Hindess & Hirst 1975, pp. 223–4). The state apparatus is decentralized: the local lords are legally and politically the dominant class and state agents, but *de facto* they are often autonomous. Tribute extraction is thus erratic, depending on the relative power of the lord and the relative ability of the producing communities to resist the military threat posed by the lord's 'protection'. Examples include the decline of the Roman Empire and the infeudation of Egypt beginning in the Fourth Dynasty (Wickham 1984, Janssen 1978, pp. 228–30).

Weak tribute-based states—such as the kingdom of Dahomey and the Abron kingdom of Gyaman—may come to rely on the taking of captives to supplement the

erratic tribute extraction from the subject population (Diamond 1951, Terray 1977, 1979). Slaves then become the major support of the dominant classes and the acquisition of this labour force involves periodic or episodic raiding of neighbouring societies, or trade as an intermittent alternative depending on the relative autonomy—and ability to resist raiding—of surrounding societies. The form of tribute extraction from the kin communities in such *slave-based states* is (a) minimal direct taxation, levied on the community as a whole, (b) intermittent military service, or (c) indirect taxation, such as extortion, disguised taxation, or state-sponsored brigandage.

Local populations may experience the state through one or more forms of extraction. For example, the Roman Empire was slave-based in the core areas while, in most of the colonies, extraction occurred through tribute payments and labour service, but not necessarily slavery. Elsewhere, the Roman state articulated with the autonomous or semi-autonomous peoples on the periphery and beyond—other tribute-based states or peoples organized on the basis of the communal mode of production—as a tribute-based state that traded for goods and slaves. Similarly, from the 13th to the 16th centuries, the Kachari state in northeastern India extracted tribute from hill tribes that they intermittently controlled but traded for slaves with those who remained autonomous (Maretina 1978, pp. 343, 349–50).

### **The communal mode of production**

In pre-capitalist state formation, encapsulated societies most often had been organized in a communal mode of production. The communal mode of production describes a range of societies where property needed for subsistence is held by the group as a whole and rights to use it are available to all on the basis of gender, age/life status, and kin connection. The society is viewed primarily through connections viewed as kinship and other forms of connection that emphasize sharing. Work, maintenance activities, authority patterns, socialization, and other reproductive activities are all organized through the stated factors of life status, gender, and kin rôle and rank. Differences in status exist. Wealth differential also may occur, but being wealthy does not entail control over the goods and services needed to maintain the customary standard of living of the community (Diamond 1974).

Within the communal mode of production, various forms of social authority can be found: these have been called egalitarian, bigmanships, and chieftainships (Service 1962, Sahlins 1963, Fried 1967). These authority patterns are important when communities become encapsulated into state societies. The relative influence exercised over production or distribution becomes sharpened politically in state formation, and this will vary with the type of ranking in the annexed society. Chieftainships in particular should not be seen as indicating incipient class stratification (Gailey 1980). There is no evidence that even the most highly stratified chieftainships—such as those of Eastern Polynesia or the north-west coast of North America—would have developed into class-stratified societies in the absence of intervention of capitalist markets or state societies. This implies that class relations can emerge in the absence of state formation, but, if so, these class hierarchies are inherently unstable (Abélès 1981, cf.

Bonte 1977, 1979). Such class relations cannot be sustained over generations without the deflection of kin-based antagonism through the emergence of mediating practices and institutions of extraction and rulership subsumed as 'the state' (Diamond 1951). Class and state formation are better viewed as an intertwined process.

What have been called the Germanic and lineage modes of production are both variants of the communal mode of production (Hobsbawm 1965, Meillassoux 1975, 1979, Gailey 1985b). These variants emerge in autonomous societies on the peripheries of tribute-based states. The particular variant will depend on the relative strength or weakness of the tribute-based state. Kinbased societies on the peripheries of strong tribute-based states express the Germanic mode of production, while those on the margins of weak tributebased states manifest features of the lineage mode of production (Bonte 1977, 1981, Rey 1975).

### **The Germanic mode of production**

The term 'Germanic mode of production' was developed by Marx to describe the autonomous peoples on the northern borders of the Roman Empire (Marx 1965). The concept has been elaborated with reference to the Sahara-Sahel nomadic herders and the Maasai of East Africa (Bonte 1977, Rigby 1985). We consider it a variant of the communal mode of production which emerges in articulation with heavily militarized, strong tribute-based states. These states are concerned with the maintenance of civil order and have standing armies or police that are directed primarily against their subjects and periodically against peoples on the margins.

In societies structured by the Germanic mode of production, the relations of production are household-based (Hobsbawm 1965).<sup>3</sup> Social continuity, i.e. the relations of reproduction, and the use of common lands and other resources depend on the household's participation in larger community structures, especially military activities. Such structures can include age-grade ceremonies, which regulate the division of labour through time, rituals linking households or similarly organized communities, or military expeditions; the latter often involved with the taking of captives (Rigby 1987). Thus, reproduction occurs at the community or regional level. In other words, while the relations of production are primarily household, the relations of reproduction must operate outside the household at the community or regional levels that link the households together. The Germanic differs from other variants of the communal mode of production. In autonomous, non-peripheral communal societies, the division of labour cross-cuts households or involves generalized co-operation among households. Production is atomized in the Germanic mode of production and reproduction is dependent upon communally organized defence.

Germanic-based societies provide tribute-based states with exotic goods, including slaves drawn from neighbouring kin-organized groups. Within the Germanic communities, there appears to be an absence of stratification because of the household basis of production, but wealth differentials exist. An increasing emphasis on raiding and pillaging for consumption and trade may lead to social differentiation and the emergence of a wealthy local élite. This élite is not necessarily a social class, since it may exercise no more social control over other community members' labour and

products than anyone else of similar age, gender, and kin rôle. Members of the community who are in pivotal trading positions may be drawn into state structures, through treaty or opportunism, as state functionaries. As retainers, they may become imperial bodyguards, trusted advisors, or military officers, since, as categorical strangers, they may form a wedge between the rulers and their collateral kin (Gailey 1985a).

There are several paths of transformation out of the Germanic mode of production. While pillaging can contribute to differential wealth or status within the communities, it alone cannot transform them. Germanic societies can become slave-based states in situations where subsistence comes to depend on domestic slaves acquired through raiding or inherited status. The Vikings during the 9th and 10th centuries, following the decline of the Carolingian state, show this pattern (Gurevich 1978, p. 413).

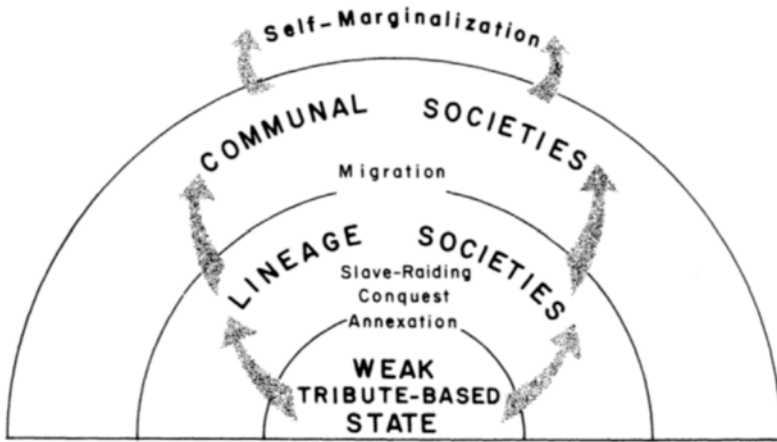
A second line of transformation can lead to feudalism. This occurs when militarization of the peripheral societies, coupled with the differential participation of households in military activities, creates a need for protection, on the one hand, and reduces certain households to dependency status, on the other (Muller 1985). Raiding may be turned inward to include the denial of the unimpeded use-rights to community members. Differential involvement in non-kin-based raiding allows participants to accumulate more than non-participants and may lead to the subordination of the latter.

The remaining paths of transformation involve the collapse of the strong tribute-based state. In the third path, the Germanic society may remain household-based, either without raiding for slaves or continuing to raid or pillage without subjecting neighbouring peoples (Rigby 1987). In the fourth, the Germanic society may return to a less atomized and less militarized communal mode of production as trade relations wither and diminish. Cases of this are under-reported, although the Pastos on the northern frontier of the Inca state may be one example (Patterson *in press*).

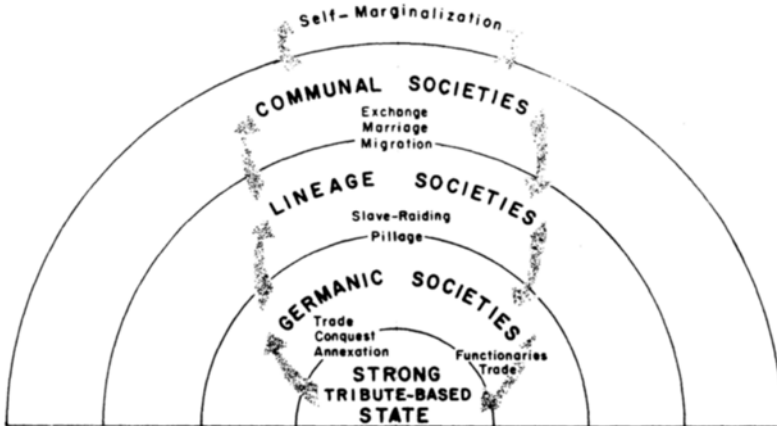
In the fifth case, the Germanic society itself may become a weak tributebased state. In this transition, it lacks the infrastructure to determine what goods are produced by subject populations; instead, warfare or pillage become a major means of acquiring goods or captives needed to support the élite. One example of this is the Mongol state that emerged on the periphery of Chinese civilization in the 13th century, following the collapse of the Sung state (Gernet 1982, pp. 301–73, cf. Khazanov 1981, pp. 169–2).

### **The lineage mode of production**

The term 'lineage mode of production' refers to societies where use-rights to products, labour, and especially land are restricted along traceable kin lines. We consider it another variant of the communal mode of production (Gailey 1985b). The term was created to describe certain West African societies with patrilineal structures that had experienced involvement in cash cropping and commodity trade (Meillassoux 1975, 1979, Rey 1975). We emphasize that not all societies that have lineage organizations manifest the lineage mode of production. In fact, most do not. Conversely, it is not necessary for societies manifesting the lineage mode of production to have lineages in the strict sense; certain forms of corporate kindreds or bilineal organizations could effect the same relations.



**Figure 4.1** Relations on the periphery: weak tribute-based state.



**Figure 4.2** Relations on the periphery: strong tribute-based state.

Lineage-based societies develop through articulation with an existing state or, in more recent times, with capital penetration. This variant of the communal mode of production emerges on the periphery of weak tributebased states as a defence against threats of encroachment on lands or appropriation of people through slave-raiding (Fig. 4.1). Communally organized societies—with or without lineage organizations—also may become lineagebased through threats by contiguous societies based on the Germanic mode of production that border a strong tribute-based (Fig. 4.2).

In contrast to the Germanic societies, lineage societies are not atomized, but are forced to defend their autonomy against threats by more militarized neighbours. They become defensively organized in non-military ways. The forms of defence emphasize continued communal control over use-rights, labour, and disposition of members.



What changes is that the various dimensions of the division of labour-gender, age/life status, kin rôle, and skill—become somewhat abstracted from each other. In other words, a person's overall status is less of an amalgam of all of the dimensions and more likely emphasizes one or two of them. These dimensions become arenas of differential control over labour and products exercised by higher status persons. The flexibility and ambiguity typical of the communal mode of production is sacrificed.

The relations of production remain community-based, as opposed to household-based in the Germanic form, but the conjugal unit may play a more prominent rôle than previously. Typically, with regard to gender relations, kin rôles that provide structural authority for women may be de-emphasized, although they are not eliminated. For example, in a patrilineal setting, the rôle of the father's sister, which is usually authoritative, may *de facto* become less important than the rôle of mother or wife, because of diminished contact with natal kin. The necessity for tighter kin organization, i.e. to resist penetration or raiding, can effectively weaken cognatic claims to labour and products. Women's authority under such circumstances comes to depend more on the rôle of mother than on that of sister (Sacks 1979).

The relations of social reproduction exist at the level of the community and of similarly organized communities linked through marriage. What distinguishes lineage-based societies from other kin-based groups is the greater degree of control exercised by older men over the inception and duration of marriages. Bridewealth payments—that is, gifts from the groom's kin to the bride's kin—can only be used to validate other kinsmen's marriages. As a result, divorce is much more difficult, because other marriages would be affected. In other kin-based societies having lineages, such bridewealth payments usually activate or strengthen the out-marrying woman's claims to the labour or products of her brothers. In societies with a lineage mode of production, however, since the community is more restrictive of cognatic or affinal claims to use-rights and labour, the claims of married or divorced sisters or widowed sisters may be truncated. In other words, divorced women and widows may be prevented from returning to their natal communities to exercise claims to land, labour, and goods (Potash 1985).

The hierarchies created when societies are forced into a lineage mode of production are unstable; they do not constitute classes, because all persons have effective use-rights through some combination of kin connection, gender, and life status. Conditions for women and junior men may be oppressive. Real exploitation does not exist, however, since all members, affinal and blood, have an unquestioned right to subsist. Senior men exert more control than other groups over marriage arrangements and the granting of bridewealth. This control is not absolute; other forms of marriage do exist, although they are less prestigious (Gough 1971). Unlike the Germanic societies, then, social differentiation in lineage societies tends to focus on social reproduction, rather than on wealth accumulation through pillage, slave-taking, or increasing household prosperity.

Several pathways of transformation are possible from communal to lineage-based societies and from lineage to other modes of production. First, when communal societies neighbour typically Germanic societies on the margins of strong tribute-based states, they either self-marginalize by migration to more remote regions, or they

become lineage-based. The tribal peoples of Popayan, who had never known rulers fled repeatedly from the Spaniards during the 1540s (Cieza de León 1947, p. 366). Some of the Kachin peoples were periodically threatened with annexation by the Shan states and represent the transformation to a lineage-based society (Leach 1964).

Second, when lineage-based and Germanic societies abut over time, as on the peripheries of strong tribute-based states or when strong tribute-based states collapse, there is a tendency for the lineage-based society to militarize and become Germanic as well. The transformation over time of the less stratified tribal peoples in northern Europe into more atomized and militarized societies show this tendency (Muller 1985). Alternatively, the peoples may flee to more inaccessible regions if possible.

A third path of transformation occurs when a weak tribute-based state collapses. The lineage-based societies on the margins are likely to return to less restrictive communal relations. The unstable hierarchies that emerged through the need to restrict use-rights and to monitor the movement of people dissolve and are replaced by less stratified relations of gender and age. The Baule of the Ivory Coast are interesting in this regard. They were refugees from several West African kingdoms, who did not replicate the more stratified conditions of their previous existence (Etienne 1986).

Upon the collapse of a weak tribute-based state, a fourth possibility emerges. One of the lineage-based societies in the social formation may become dominant and establish weak tribute-based relations with lower ranking kin and surrounding Germanic and communal societies. The Ankole show this pattern (Steinhart 1978, pp. 143–6). In such cases, domestic slavery may emerge alongside weak labour service extraction.

When a weak tribute-based state becomes a strong one, a fifth path is possible. Lineage-based societies are likely to become Germanic, as resistance through non-military means is increasingly ineffectual and communal control over production weakens.

## Discussion

The transformation from kin-based societies to class-based state societies is contingent not on natural laws, but on historically specific conditions, shaped by human action. States emerge and collapse; in terms of the realization of human potentialities, they are not the highest form of social development (Diamond 1974). The framework outlined above provides a means for understanding some of the dynamics leading to the collapse or emergence of state societies, and the regional dynamics associated with state formation.

The emergence of state societies has immediate effects on the stratification and production relations of surrounding societies. The social organization of those in closest proximity to the state, but independent of it, will reflect the degree of threat of the expanding state. State formation, in spatial terms, creates a ripple effect of increasing stratification and increasingly rigid forms of kinship in surrounding societies, the most stratified and most militarized being closest to the state. If the state is weak, the autonomous kin societies on the periphery will retain communal control over production and reproduction, but will have more rigid forms of kin-determined

use-rights and marriage arrangements. If the tribute-based state is strong, then the kin communities on the periphery lose control over production—a process we refer to as atomization or household-based production—while they retain communal control over certain resources, reproductive processes, and military activities. Whether or not the states collapse will depend on the degree of centralization and dissolution of subject people's kin communities, on the one hand, and the associated degree of communal disintegration on the periphery, on the other.

States are destructive of kin societies in their midst and therefore create the conditions for ethnocide and genocide (Bodley 1982). On the peripheries, resistance to state penetration may foster more rigid and repressive conditions within societies with altered forms of a communal mode of production; in the process, gender relations often become skewed (Gailey 1985b). 'Repression at home and conquest abroad' is the central dynamic of state formation, as is the struggle between kin-based productive and reproductive priorities and those imposed by the civil authorities (Diamond 1974, p. 1). For the encapsulated kin communities, this set of conditions created in the process of state formation necessarily involves resistance on a number of cultural and political fronts. This shared history of exploitation and resistance constitutes a basis for ethnogenesis, that is, the forging of a genuine culture in the face of the inauthentic culture promoted by the state (Diamond 1974, Sider 1976, Sapir 1958).

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### Notes

- 1 This model has implications for the analysis of gender relations in kin-based societies, as well as those in pre-capitalist states. The impact of stratification on gender relations can be seen not only in colonial processes or capital penetration, or even direct state formation, but also in autonomous kin-based societies defending their integrity against envelopment by more powerful, more stratified neighbouring societies (Leacock 1972, 1983, Sacks 1979, Muller 1977, 1985, Silverblatt 1981, 1987, Gailey 1980, 1985a, 1985b).
- 2 Social reproduction in a kin-based society does not, of course, involve class domination. As described elsewhere, social reproduction includes the replication of non-working sectors of a population, such as the aged or those too young to work, as well as the rituals through which people are recruited and socialized in the range of their social rôles (Gailey 1985a).
- 3 The Germanic mode of production comes the closest to resembling Chayanov's (1966) model of the independent household-producing unit, only not in a state/

peasant context. As such, it also resembles what Sahlins (1972) has called the domestic mode of production.

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*Subsistence, social control of resources and the development of complex society in the Valley of Mexico*

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Since Steward's methodological propositions on multilineal evolution and the development of complex society<sup>1</sup> there has been substantial archaeological and historical research, as well as theoretical discussion, about the causal factors and determinants of social and cultural change, such as environment, technology, conflict, population pressure, political centralization and redistributive economic systems. Various attempts have been made to analyse levels of sociocultural integration, comparing cultures selected from throughout the world, instead of studying specific examples of development from one level to another. Such studies fail to confront not only the various factors and conditions of change, but also the total evolutionary processes of genetically related societies.<sup>2</sup>

In the specific case of the Valley of Mexico I would argue that Wittfogel's original proposition offers a way out of this dilemma. In his article 'Die natürlichen Ursachen der Wirtschaftsgeschichte' (1970), Wittfogel describes the social process of labour as the dialectic relationship between man and nature, which historically conditions the 'actualization' of the natural and social elements in the process of production. In other words, labour transforms nature and imprints its action on the environment. Each step creates a new nature and a culturally transformed humanity. This process can be analysed in terms of the control gained by men over certain natural processes, which in turn enables us to deduce the creation of exclusive rights and social divisions in what we usually call the differential access to strategic resources.

This methodological framework permits the analysis of the fundamental rôle of hydraulic control throughout 3000 years of evolution in the Valley of Mexico. In addition, it allows us to evaluate other determinants in the process of the evaluation of complex societies.

Mesoamerica has been included as one of the six cases of pristine state formation or archaic hydraulic civilization,<sup>3</sup> cases which are still being discussed in terms of their class structure and the nature of their political organization. This discussion has centred upon research conducted principally in the Valley of Mexico covering the pre-conquest period.<sup>4</sup> For earlier periods most scholars have adopted Service's suggestion of a chiefdom stage preceding every instance of state formation throughout the world. There are also Marxist formulations on 'oriental society' as a general stage pertaining to a remote egalitarian past (see, for example, Krader 1979). According to these models, political society and stratification would be absent phenomena in such kinoriented organizations and redistributive systems.



In this chapter I propose that the application of a diachronic perspective adds new insights about when and how the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico in a differential process of accumulation transformed the environment, creating cultural conditions for subsistence and gaining control over nature and power over other men.

### **The primitive ancestors (6000?–1500 BC)**

Although we still do not have evidence about the prehistoric periods preceding sedentary agricultural villages in the Valley of Mexico, research on the origin of cultivation in the macro-area allows us to formulate new hypotheses about local processes of cultural adaptation. We know that the early hunters and gatherers did not depend for subsistence on the megafauna and that they were not specialized groups.<sup>5</sup> We can propose, in view of the natural resources and climatic conditions which existed, a series of adaptations territorially defined by the seasonality of the growth and reproduction of plants and animals and by the scheduling for their utilization by the human groups.<sup>6</sup> A network of kinship relations would have linked all the neighbouring groups, providing the social means for seasonal congregation and dispersal, as well as for exchange. The labour requirements would more effectively have been accomplished by co-operation than by competition, engaging able-bodied men and women, of all ages.

The demographic composition of the groups seems to have impeded conflict, since the loss of members would have threatened survival. There is no archaeological evidence of violence.

None of the arts of capturing the fruits of nature had evolved to the point of providing a social surplus beyond the groups' consumption needs, and only some techniques for conservation and carrying provided for exchange and distribution during moments of congregation. Equal responsibilities in the tasks of subsistence conferred equal rights on the products, and the technological equipment shows no functional differentiation either within or between groups.

The increase in population is a reflection of the increasing efficiency in the arts of subsistence, which focused on the continuous aggregation and accumulation of knowledge about the ways of nature and of co-operative ways of social organization.

Prehistoric man continually interfered in the processes of nature, experimenting with and favouring certain phases in the cycles of animals and plants. The material from the Tchuacan Valley project clearly shows that the genetic composition of some species was modified through selection. However, nomadism, caused by the enduring dependence on wild food, limited for centuries man's domestication of nature.

It was only with the development of corn and bean cultivation that there emerged special characteristics that would produce a qualitatively new relationship between the members of human communities. This was the first step towards complex society and civilization.

The Valley of Mexico apparently remained peripheral to the first agricultural and sedentary developments in America. Although there is some evidence for the presence of cultivated maize, (uncertainly dated 3000 BC), it seems more secure to talk about

its decisive influence around 1500 BC, due probably to the successful creation of short-cycle varieties that would grow and mature during the frost-free months.

### **The first agricultural villages (1500–600 BC)**

Man and maize had a symbiotic relationship. We cannot ascertain if this occurred endogenously in the Valley of Mexico, or if its first cultivators moved in from more tropical adjacent valleys where maize production had been previously established.

The archaeological-ecological surveys<sup>7</sup> reveal that the favourable niches were quickly occupied by these cultivators, displacing other groups from their probably temporary camps by the lakeside. These niches contained the natural elements that could guarantee successful cultivation: a small river with nearby fertile and irrigable land.

The levelling of the ground, the building of small canals, and the digging of water holes in the rich alluvial beaches were the activities that created the cultural conditions of cultivation; these created the exclusive rights of the performers and their differentiation from hunters and gatherers.

Although these settlements were small, from our perspective, and dependence on wild food still important, the sedentary farmers became, from then onwards, the central planners of seasonal working performance. The importance of the monopolization of intellectual labour by the centre is seen in the temple functioning as the intermediary between man and nature. In what was probably a redistributive economy, the agricultural centre received more goods and labour than it returned, a process of unequal exchange which led to the differentiation in residential patterns and levels of consumption.

The intensification of agriculture and its expansion to all of the favourable niches gave rise to the Early Formative villages and towns known in the archaeological literature. These are located in the southern half of the Valley of Mexico. There were monumental buildings and public spaces in which performances of ritual were concentrated. We also find the development of crafts and of means to procure raw materials and goods encountered at short and long-distance, which were destined, for the most part, for the conspicuous consumption which distinguished the social élite.

We know very little about the changes of hunting and gathering techniques probably caused by increasing specialization, which was in turn the result of the new exchange arrangements. Fishing must have made substantial instrumental progress, as did navigation, while hunters increased their skills and the effectiveness of their weapons.

Owing to the absence of domesticable herd animals in Mexico, hunting and fishing remained important economic activities during all pre-Spanish periods. People engaged in these activities have never been sufficiently recognized as forming part of the culture; nor has their dynamic rôle been described or explained.

While fishermen moved in a limited lake environment whose frontiers were occupied and controlled by agriculturalists, hunters enjoyed an open territory and almost unbounded freedom—a freedom which interfered with the expansion of the agricultural villages. One way to subordinate them was to separate them from their

tools, through the appropriation of the raw material deposits and the development of urban craft specialization in the production of weapons. A second possible method would have been the division into what may be labelled provisionally 'tame' and 'wild' hunters, i.e. those who regularly exchanged their game for agricultural and manufactured goods and those who maintained a greater degree of independence. The first ones would also, in return, be willing to chase the other hunters, to assault neighbouring villages and towns, and to give protection to their patrons. The reward would have been high status and participation in decision making and other prerogatives for the leaders.

Agriculture, sedentarism, specialization, and social differentiation occurred accompanied by violence.

### **The development of cities (600 BC-AD 300)<sup>8</sup>**

Cuicuilco and Tlapacoya were the first urban settlements in the Valley of Mexico. In the Valleys of Puebla and Tlaxcala there were several equivalent centres, and it is probable that a few others developed in similar ecological niches in the present state of Morelos and along the western Sierra Madre. These sites are characterized by monumental buildings and public places; streets and avenues followed an urban design; and there were distinct residential wards for diverse specialists. The planning élite or priesthood lived near or in the palace-temples in the central area and close to them were found the manufacturers of the most valuable luxury and export crafts. Domestic tools and implements were produced in quarters whose remains clearly reflect lower living standards.

The development of these cities was spurred by population increase and by competition for valleys with strategic advantages. It is interesting to note that the Early Formative villages and towns went through a process of ruralization and obvious subordination.

Irrigation technology undoubtedly had a significant influence in this process. Men learned to build dams on larger river beds; the water reservoirs were sufficient to supply urban needs and to irrigate terraced fields quite distant from the main stream in spite of very considerable topographical obstacles. The hillsides isolated from irrigation systems were transformed by terracing and levelling and served as areas of maize and agave cultivation. Chinampa agriculture was expanding within the lakes.

Four different farming systems were integrated around the administrative centre: a year-round intensive horticulture in the gardens of the élite near the central allotment system in the palace; intensive irrigated terraces which probably yielded two crops a year worked by a privileged peasantry; the intensively cultivated *chinampas*, and one-crop maize farming complemented with long-cycle cultivation of agave. Chinampa cultivators were becoming a subcultural unit characterized by their very specialized technological adaptation.

A fifth category of peasants living in rural settlements can be distinguished by the absence of public works designed to increase production. Rather, we can assume, they were compelled to transfer their surplus labour and goods to the city, as were, no doubt, the fishermen and hunters.

In the process of adding differential labour to elements of nature, maize agriculture is 'actualized' and social differentiation emerges and becomes more and more complex. The cumulative knowledge of biological, topographical and climatic features of the landscape and their potential uses led to the discovery of new adaptive forms which depended on a main water course. The culturally created resources became distinctive by their scarceness, and their control induced competition.

The systems which demanded smaller amounts of labour in the artificial conditioning of the land were secondary developments. This created a stratified peasantry whose surplus labour was transferred to the more intensive systems and to the needs of the city-dwellers. A similar division of labour occurred in the production and distribution of manufactured goods.

Social and economic stratification was reflected in the settlement pattern. It must be stressed that this differentiation was not a result of the amount of labour involved in each activity, but of the differential value socially accorded to its application to cultural and natural resources. The governing priesthood and bureaucracy were responsible for the creation of an ideology which attributed the construction and control of the cultural resources to the gods (that is to themselves), and which usurped the propitiation of nature. For this they had to be rewarded with offerings, tribute, and more labour.

### **The rise of an imperial state: Teotihuacán (c. AD200–700)**

Although the previous developments demonstrated to some extent certain imperial characteristics, it is Teotihuacan which seems to be the first city that succeeded in centralizing power over a huge expanse of Mesoamerican territory.

The rise of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico was causally related to the eruption of the Xitle volcano that buried Cuicuilco during the first century AD. Recent research in Puebla and Tlaxcala reveals that Teotihuacán's growth was responsible for the processes of ruralization of all the sites that showed urban development during the Late Formative.<sup>9</sup>

It seems quite clear that at the turn of the millennium people from Cuicuilco, Tlapacoya, and other cities had conceived, and were about to carry out, an irrigation project of considerable dimensions in the Teotihuacán Valley. Following the grid plan of the future streets, public spaces and buildings, the remains of an accompanying urban colonization destroyed those of a small peasant village near the main wells. The builders worked under the protection of fortified posts.

The Teotihuacan Valley represented, after Cuicuilco, the vastest extension of rich alluvial soils uncovered by the lake waters of the Valley of Mexico. A crown of hills and mountains surrounded it and offered slopes for terracing. The nearby lake supplied fish and fowl and possibilities for chinampa agriculture. By itself, the rainfall in the Teotihuacan region was not sufficient to ensure a significant agricultural surplus, thus the maintenance of an urban population undoubtedly depended upon the development of irrigation.

This was made more necessary by the influx of population from the destroyed town of Cuicuilco. By the time of Teotihuacan's apogee (c. AD 550) the entire valley and

its adjacent slopes were under intensive agricultural exploitation, and the coastal swamps and lake areas had been transformed into chinampas.

In Teotihuacán three main kinds of peasants can be distinguished: those who worked the irrigated fields and lived in the city in crowded multifamily apartment compounds or in similar compact and restricted settlements along the grid-patterned landscape; those who lived in the terraced hills where specialized agave cultivation and manufacture dominated; and further away in the Valley of Mexico and across its watershed a third type of peasantry practised swidden agriculture.

Outside the Teotihuacán Valley no other region in the central highlands shows signs of agricultural intensification or urban planning and building. The rural surplus of this large area went to the city, where the exchange and distribution of goods and labour were concentrated and supervised by the centralized decision-making, political-religious authorities.

The settlement pattern was rigid in the city as well as in the country. In the city the distinct wards inhabited by agricultural labourers, craftsmen, merchants, and bureaucrats were separated one from another as well as from the government palaces. In the countryside each settlement was associated with a single resource, thus constituting closed specialized communities compelled to go to the city to exchange their produce and for their social, political, and religious activities.

Urban consumption also required colonization in the hinterland, where exotic resources could be obtained. Teotihuacán's influence by conquest, labour allotment, trade, and religious proselytism left its traces throughout present-day Mexico.

It seems quite evident that urban and rural specialization and division of labour came from above with the centre's decision and execution of agricultural development in the Teotihuacán Valley. The gods, assembled in Teotihuacán, seized control over the social order.

The dispositional character of the division of labour suggests that violence was used beyond the authoritative bases derived from the irrigation system. It seems that only the city itself and its surrounding region could develop under peaceful conditions. Rural and peripheral expansion, however, relied upon specialists in the use of weapons who slowly increased their efficiency in military activities. Because of their strategic importance they acquired high positions within the system.

### **The Toltec expansion (AD 700–1100)**

Teotihuacán's imperial expansion followed the natural course of the rivers that descend from the highlands to the oceans. Outside the watershed of the Valley of Mexico at each riverhead there appeared settlements which, though originally small, quickly grew to become regional centres. Unlike Teotihuacán these cities occupied strategic military positions reinforced with defensive constructions; they accepted the centre-delegated control of the communication routes with the establishment of long-distance trading posts.<sup>10</sup>

These city-builders were learned specialists from Teotihuacán, but they faced different conditions in the periphery. The urban grid-pattern and the apartment compounds and wards had to be created on artificially levelled ground around the

mountains. The water supply was taken from upstream to reservoirs in the public centre and distributed to the wards and cultivated terraces.

The river systems used for irrigation also provided a new impetus to downstream military expansion. These cities provided a centrifugal force that opposed Teotihuacán's centralizing tendency. Their control over exchange routes, their political power over conquerors, conquered, and colonizers, together with internal rebellion against the metropolis's extreme rigidity, caused a shift of the centre of the empire from Teotihuacán to Tula. Archaeological and historical evidence does not make clear whether or not Tula dominated her sisters, or if the situation was one of several competing states.

Tula's influence is more evident in its northern expansion. Along the Tula-Moctezuma-Pánuco river basin its penetration reached the old civilized Huasteca and Totonaca regions, whose development had not been as drastically interrupted and usurped as in the highlands. Along the Lerma River and its tributaries as far as Lake Chapala up to Durango and Zacatecas were found dispersed agricultural communities and nomadic hunters and gatherers. The continued existence of the colonial establishments demanded the dispositional reallocation of the labour force for the creation of intensive cultivation systems that would support the military garrisons and the nonagricultural producers of goods required by the dominant bureaucracy. New elements of nature continued to be used—the cultivation of fibre plants (especially cotton which was spun by women, for tribute payments); cacao for luxury consumption and money, and precious stones for adornment. Mining of 'chalchihuitl' and jade was the stimulus for the development of very complex and stratified settlements in northern Mexico.

The Toltec expansion reproduced the agrohydraulic solutions developed in Teotihuacán. But this vast landscape lacked an integrative element, a single water source that could be centrally controlled and managed. Warfare became ever more important and I assume that during this time the 'wild' hunters were definitely marginalized from the Mesoamerican territory.

### **A new reconcentration of efforts (AD 1100–1500)**

Detailed review of historic documents on Chichimec and Toltec migrations<sup>11</sup> shows that certain government sectors became increasingly conscious of their growing loss of control caused by the northern expansion. Their pressure provoked a renewed concentration of population in the central highlands, dispositionally transported once again to assure the necessary labour for the creation of intensive agricultural systems. In an earlier paper (Boehm de Lameiras 1980, also in press) I proposed that the geopolitical strategy of the Chichimec leaders focused around the high mountain ridges and their rivers and that this led to the rise of several states between the 10th and 14th centuries. I also pointed out that this strategy impeded the formation of a single centralized state, which only came to be when *chinampa* agriculture in the lake system of the Valley of Mexico developed from being a competitive enterprise between the adjacent political units to a centralized, controlled administration.

It was the Mexica *chinampa*-builders who gained, through trial and error and through working for the different successive political entities, the knowhow to control the lake, Mexico-Tenochtitlan was located precisely at the centre of the system, where the water supply could be regulated and used for production or for destructive punishment.

The success of this enterprise was due to knowledge of the environment, to effective organization of the labour force, to the formation of a military sector well trained in lake battles, and to political kinship arrangements between the regional dominant lineages who provided for the formation of the Mexica royalty and for its national character.

It is important to mention that these processes of political centralization were accompanied by the formation of ever new levels of sociocultural integration carried on through the continuous destruction and rebuilding of peasant and urban communities, and the creation of new identities and of class relationships.

During 100 years of Mexican hegemony intensive agriculture reached its highest development in the history of the Valley of Mexico. Each region was headed by a city as large as Teotihuacán at its peak, all of complex composition and politically subordinated to Tenochtitlan. The productive infrastructure under Mexican direction rapidly expanded to neighbouring valleys and to more distant regions.

Imperialism relied on military action where geographical factors did not allow for hydraulic integration to the central highlands. But the regions developed under closely interrelated historic traditions were more easily subordinated without substantive change in their internal structure.

The maintenance and reinforcement of the state structure demanded its intensification and expansion. The office-holders and their families formed the dominant class or '*pipiltin*' and their loyal services to increase the power of the state were rewarded with access to different kinds of land, the corvée labour of attached peasants, as well as the products of craftsmen, merchants, and other specialists. In addition they enjoyed the use of servants who provided for their households, collected their taxes and tribute, and managed their economic activities. The state economy itself was organized as an extension of the despot's household. Those who worked for the nobility were the '*maceualtin*' (see Carrasco 1978).

### Some conclusions

It is generally accepted that during the Preclassic or Formative period the basic patterns of Mesoamerican civilization were formulated. This indicates a basic cultural continuity from the time of the first agricultural villages up to the formation of the militaristic states of the Postclassic period. The data on Mesoamerica also reveal continuous growth in size and complexity accompanied by changes and shifts of the core areas, of the ways of expanding territorially and of integrating other groups and cultures, as well as of the formation of social strata and subcultural units with diagnostic characteristics of the relationships prevailing in each period.

This review of the archaeological and historical materials of the Valley of Mexico has been guided by a theoretical framework which postulates that the relationship between man and nature is established through social labour in a dynamic-dialectic process which creates cultural environments and ever new organizations and cultural ways of relating to them.

Cumulative knowledge and labour transformed species of wild plants into cultigens, and maize culture demanded man-made topographical and hydraulic conditions. Control over natural processes created exclusive rights, and the first social divisions of labour between appropriative and productive activities, and between intellectual and manual work, which remained 'actual and marked the direction of further developments.

Intensification and expansion were violent processes carried on through centre-directed projects permitted or inhibited by the characteristics of the agrohydraulic systems, by the organization of the labour force and by the 'actualization' of new elements of nature and their labour requirements. Crafts and trade developed out of the needs of new productive solutions and out of social and cultural differentiation; while hunters divided into 'tame' (allied to agriculturalists) and 'wild' (chased to the periphery of civilization). The former became powerful military sectors of Mesoamerica, the latter warlike independent societies. Fishermen increased their economic importance through specialization and concomitant efficiency, and gained power when competition for strategic lakes was imposed by the expansion of chinampa agriculture in the Valley of Mexico.

Differential labour input in productive activities created stratified producers. Dispositional specialization in rural and urban production institutionalized a *corvée* labour force designed to provide for the subsistence of the dominant bureaucracy. The generated class structure could finally do without the imposition of local and regional limitations to development.

In this chapter I have stressed that hydraulic agriculture was the core stimulus for development. Most specifically I have pointed out that other economic activities developed parallel to irrigation and made this line of evolution possible, while causal determinants such as environment, the use of violence, political centralization and economic redistribution underwent qualitative transformation at each level of sociocultural integration.

### Notes

- 1 Steward (1955). This author's (1949) article opened the discussion and comparative analysis of archaic civilizations following Wittfogel's theoretical propositions. A first meeting was held in Washington in 1955, and subsequent meetings incorporated new research (see Wolf 1976, Introduction).
- 2 General evolution has been the topic of authors such as White (1949) insisting on the diagnostic rôle of technology, and Service (1962, 1975), relying on a more eclectic approach, among others. Fried's (1973) propositions on the differences between pristine and secondary state-formations and on the importance of explaining the transitions from one evolutionary stage to the other are particularly suggestive.



- Sanders & Price (1968) followed for the first time explicitly an ecological-evolutionary model in the analysis and exposition of Mesoamerica's cultural development.
- 3 See Fried (1967, 1973). Wittfogel (1967–1970) labelled Mesoamerica as a 'loose hydraulic society', because the basic features of production and of despotic rule appeared more diffuse than in typical cases of oriental society. I support the application of the hydraulic model to this area, its particular characteristics deriving from its geography and from the subordination of more extensive cultivators and other producers, i.e. hunters and fishermen.
  - 4 The main defender of the Asiatic mode of production for Mesoamerica was Palerm (1973), who succeeded in documenting the complexity of the Valley of Mexico's integrated agrohydraulic system at its peak in the early 16th century. See also Sanders (1976b).
  - 5 These were the results of research conducted in the Tehuacan Valley by MacNeish (Byers 1967–1970).
  - 6 According to Flannery's (1971) model.
  - 7 The data analysed for this period come from archaeological reports by Blanton (1972), Parsons (INAH Archives, files 1967, 1971, 1973, 1974), Sanders (1972, 1976a). See also Boehm de Lameiras (1986).
  - 8 The data for this period are taken from the same authors plus Piña Chan (1956), Heizer & Bennyhoff (1958).
  - 9 This period's analysis relies mainly on data produced by Millon's (1973) and Sanders' (INAH Archives files 1963–1975) archaeological projects on Teotihuacan. See also Armillas (1944a, 1944b, 1950, 1964) and Parsons (1968).
  - 10 Tula's urban settlement and its northern expansion are taken from Matos Moctezuma *et al* (1974, 1976), Yadeun Angulo (1975), Diehl (1974), Weigand (1968), Kelley (1971). Ethnohistoric research was pioneered by Kirchhoff (1962). See Boehm de Lameiras (1986).
  - 11 Guided by Palerm's (1973) agrohydraulic reconstruction of the Valley of Mexico I traced the history of the system and the strategic roles of the Mexicas working for different political entities (Boehm de Lameiras 1986).

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*Hierarchization in Maya segmentary states*

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**Economics and ethnohistory**

A fertile interplay has developed within the last generation between theorization about origins and functions of states in Mesoamerica (e.g. Wittfogel 1957, Service 1962) and archaeological data generated from largescale projects (e.g. Tikal, Teotihuacán, Copan). Such prehistoric archaeological data are often framed within trade explanations to account for sociocultural transformation. For the Postclassic (c. AD 900s-1500s) Maya states of Eastern Mesoamerica, however, the conjunction of ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence reveals actual kinship groups and their political interaction for the last aboriginal periods (e.g. Tozzer 1957, Roys 1962, Scholes & Roys 1968, Carmack 1968) which evince little concern with trade, irrigation, or other variables customarily cited. Thus, ethnohistory adds an ethnographic-like dimension-often missing in non-historical archaeology-of that which was of vital concern to Postclassic peoples, namely their lineage events *vis-à-vis* other such groups embedded in political and economic cross ties.

So, too, recent translations of Maya hieroglyphs for the Classic period also allow identification of inter- and intra-community kinship ties, as well as views of vital rituals binding these peoples together (e.g. Schele & Miller 1986). This more 'emic' perspective provides a view quite contrastive with reconstructions stressing long-distance trade for obtaining salt, obsidian, and manos and metates as the *raison d'être* (Rathje 1971); or sociocultural scenarios having responded in large measure to environmental distinctions in soils and rainfall (Sanders 1977).

This chapter examines as segmentary lineage behavioural norms such characteristics of the Postclassic Maya states as long-distance migration, amalgamations of specific lineages into confederacies and then states, and the subsequent seemingly anomalous dissolutions of such polities, nevertheless with certain materialist correlations. Developmental sequences in state formation will be traced at Chichen Itza and Mayapan in Yucatan. Acalan in the Chontalpa of the southern Gulf Coast, Tayasal in Peten, and for the Quiche and Cakchiquel in highland Guatamala.

This approach contrasts with recent reconstructions of the Quiche state as having arisen from *in situ* evolution, from controlling the commercial inflow of obsidian and

sal t. The Postclassic governmental apparatus was said to derive in formal conception from trading contacts with what was reconstructed as a 'port of trade' at Middle Classic period (AD 400–600) Kaminaljuyu (Brown 1980, 1984, 1985). So, too, inland situated Acalan (Scholes & Roys 1968), another Chontal polity, has long been considered a 'port of trade' (Chapman 1957). Contrary to the construct of unitary states often assumed in the archaeological literature, comparative data from Postclassic Maya states reveal rather orthodox manifestations of somewhat decentralized and less hierarchical segmentary states, more in line with those known ethnographically in Africa (e.g. Alur, Southall 1956).

### **Chontal migration from ethnohistory**

The disparate segmentary political systems, separated by some 700 km in a straight line at the northern and southern edges of Eastern Mesoamerica, were each initiated by separate though kindred Chontal (or Putun) kinship groupings which can be traced from the Chontalpa Gulf lowland homeland or secondary locations in what seems to have been the mid-AD 1800s through the early 900s (Roys 1962, Borhegyi 1965, Carmack 1968, Thompson 1970). Fortunately, these peripatetic peoples left a rich corpus of native writings (e. g. the *Popol Vuh* and the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* for the highland Maya, or the various renditions of the *Chilam Balam* prophecies in the lowlands) which specify migrations and locations. Migration can also be archaeologically traced inland at a succession of sites along the Rio Usumacinta in the mid-800s (e.g. Kowalski 1985, Sabloff & Willey 1967, Willey *et al* 1975). From these mid-Usumacinta loci, which were for the most part abandoned in the early 900s, secondary long-distance migrations were launched north into the Peten lake district by Itza related peoples (e.g. the site of Muralla de Leon was built contemporaneously, Rice & Rice 1981, 1984), and on to Yucatan at Chichen Itza by about AD 918 (Roys 1962, 1967, Thompson 1970). However, until recently unrecognized, branches of the same Itza and Xiu families also penetrated directly from the Seibal area upland along the Rio Usumacinta's primary tributary, the Rio Negro, to establish a series of sites such as Tuja in Sacapulas, paralleling in settlement patterning and ceramics Chichen Itza, Mayapan, Seibal, and Champoton. Less grandiose sites from these Chontal diasporas, such as Muralla de Leon in Peten and the Quiche's Jacawitz in Guatemala, also archaeologically match one another as well as those in and about Acalan (Fox 1987).

### **Segmentary lineage organization**

From a mode of production standpoint (cf. Wolf 1982), segmentary lineages tend to be estate (i.e., in this case, land) controlling, producing and consuming descent groups who pool their military and political efforts with neighbouring lineages according to genealogical and spatial proximity. Such amalgamation is particularly likely to exist between economically and politically autonomous

groups when threatened by peoples more removed in kinship, or by complete outsiders who are not connected through common ancestors at all (e.g. Maya peoples defending their territories against the onslaught of confederated Chontal descended intruders). For the relatively politically uncentralized segmentary organization, more evident in the ethnographic literature of Africa (e.g. Nuer), the relative power of one segmentary lineage is, at least hypothetically, equal to that of any other segmentary lineage. However, when challenged by a greater external force, these lineages will aggregate into coalitions of a sufficiently massive size, calling to arms fairly remote kinsmen, to emerge victorious (Middleton & Tait 1958, 1970, pp. 6–41). ‘Complementary opposition creates the structure: without opposition the higher segments do not exist’ (Sahlins 1961, p. 333).

Relations between segments tend to be balanced between the seemingly contradictory principles of competition and co-operation, with degrees of autonomy for each segment maintained at each level of unification. But the cornerstone of amalgamating principles seems to be the dualism of symmetrical coupling, when two similar units pool their efforts. When this basic coupled unit joins another two-part unit, a four-part grouping results (cf. Wallace 1977, p. 28), but one strictly counterbalanced by a quadripartite grouping of similar magnitude. As a case in point for the Nima Quiche confederate of the Quiche alliance, 24 principal agnatic lineages coalesced into four major lineages, which in turn coupled again to form one of three confederates (i.e. Nima Quiche, Tamub, and Ilocab). For the Quichean peoples as well as throughout Eastern Mesoamerica in general, interethnic political confrontation repeatedly involved confederacies or groupings of three or four kinship-based units. From ethnohistory we learn that Chichen Itza was actually an alliance of ‘three brothers’ (cf. collateral kinsmen, Landa 1941, p. 56, Tozzer 1957, 2, p. 31; *Chilam Balam of Tizimin* 1982, pp. 84–5). The later Itza confederacy in Peten had four supreme office holders and its central ‘city’, Tayasal, was quadripartitioned (cf. Rice & Rice 1984, Henderson 1981, p. 66), as was Itzamkanac of Acalan, and, apparently, the three or four Cimatanes within the Chontalpa homeland (*Relaciones de Yucatan* (1579) 1898, pp. 386, 409, 414, Scholes & Roys 1968, p. 32).

To reiterate, when outside pressures prevail, the bonds of political cohesion tend to weaken. Accordingly, ‘political histories’ of the Quiche and Cakchiquel, as well as those of the lowland Itza and Xiu (i.e. *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*), depict numerous accounts of lineages attempting coups over fellow lineages to manipulate coalitions from positions of supremacy. These documents also tell of confederacies having dissolved, with one or more lineages relocating to distant territories. To illustrate, Chichen Itza in the AD 1100s and later Mayapan in the AD 1460s succumbed to such internal strife, with subsequent complete disarticulation (cf. Landa 1941, *Chilam Balam of Tizimin* 1982). The slightly more centralized Quiche at Utatlan and the Cakchiquel at Iximche each barely survived major coups by one of their three principal confederates (i.e. the Ilocab and Tukuiche).

As a case in point, following the Quiche’s final victory over the indigenous highland Guatemalan Maya (Vukamak), who had attempted for two centuries to repel the intruders, the Ilocab disbanded the Quiche alliance and moved into the next valley, Ilotenango (Fox 1977, pp. 85–6, Carmack 1981, p. 173, Fig. 6). At this time, the

genealogically closer and more eminent Nima Quiche and Tamub joined to form a more potent military force, coercing the Ilocab back into the 'coalition' as powerless 'partners' (*Popol Vuh* 1971). In early 'history', the Cakchiquel also demonstrated comparable symmetrical lineage 'merging' of four divisions, but with separate leaders, one from each moiety (i.e. Gacawitz, Zactecauj) and with two separate deities for the two moieties (Xajil 1953, pp. 43–52). However, my suspicion is that quadripartition was more likely an ideological ideal Mexican form. In this regard, ethnohistory tended more towards ideology than reflecting normative behaviour, which is borne out in archaeological settlement patterning. At the first Quiche and Rabinal sites in the Guatemalan highlands, at the clusters grouped around Jacawitz and Tzameneb, respectively, settlement organization is decidedly tripartite.

As an underlying ecological factor to segmentary lineage predatory expansion, migrations into new territories seem to result when the population exceeds local carrying capacity. More specifically, this factor seems to derive from the relationship between population growth and soil exhaustion (from generally four to five generations of swidden cultivation). At that time, new minimal segments simply break from existing principal lineages and then push into new lands. The Quichean documents certainly allude to overcrowding in their Gulf lowland homeland triggering migrations inland and upland to Guatemala specifically in quest of new lands (cf. Tzutuujil 1973). In later expansionary episodes after establishing a segmentary state, migrations can be ethnohistorically and archaeologically traced into basins of remarkably similar ecology as the Quiche Basin (i.e. about 1900 m elevation). In these new locales, the Quiche built civic plazas replicating the spatial ordering of Greater Utatlan so that the lineages could resume their genealogical/political alignments (cf. Pueblo Viejo Canilla-Xoyabaj, Pa Maca, Tenam-Balamija, Zaculeu, Chuisac-Ochal, Fox 1977, 1978, p. 285) (see Fox 1987, Ch. 6).

### **Proxemics of segmentary lineage organization**

For Chontal descendants dispersed throughout Eastern Mesoamerica, the basic settlement pattern unit representative of the basic kinship segment was the orthogonal 'temple-long structure-altar' complex. Not only does this settlement unit occur in all Quiche, Cakchiquel and Sacapultec sites in the Guatemalan highlands, but it also is spatially characteristic of the sites within the Chontalpa, as well as those built by the Itza, Xiu, and others in Yucatan. At Mayapan, for example, there are about a dozen of these complexes (Proskouriakoff 1962, p. 91), which brings to mind ethnohistorical references to the 12 'priests', 12 'nobles', and 12 'families' there (Landa 1941, p. 40). The colonnaded long houses (long structures), each with a hearth to represent lineage autonomy and authority, are surely identified with the principal patrilineage (*nimja*) (cf. Wallace 1977, p. 21, Carmack 1977, p. 5, Acuna 1968). Again, for the better-known Quiche (Carmack 1981, pp. 192–3):

The lineage houses, or *nim ja* ('big houses')...became more administrative than kinship in function. Judicial affairs (*K'atbal tzij*) were particularly

associated with the big houses, and even today among the lineages of rural Quiche legal judgments based on traditional procedures are called *nim ja*.... The buildings varied in size according to the rank of the sponsoring lineages. The lords sat on short-legged benches and chairs (*tem, ch'acat*) draped with mats.... Lopez-Mendez (n.d.) informs us that famous just rulers were buried in the big houses under the locations where they had exercised their administrative duties in life. A fire was kept burning at each big house symbolizing the independence of that lineage from all other lineages.

The largely symmetrical aggregating tendencies for the newly arrived Quiche segmentary lineages at Chujuyup in the AD 900s are manifest in archaeological proxemics, for each of the three residential sites (Jacawitz, Amak Tam, and Uquin Cat) have two civic plazas: each plaza containing the 'templelong structure-altar' complex plus one or more long structures. Moreover, the additional long buildings in each plaza seem to indicate that several principal lineages within each of the Ajaw and Cawek major lineages migrated together, or fissioned within the early generations at Jacawitz, at least by the time the site was abandoned in the AD 1100s. When colonizing new areas deep in foreign territories, clustering of confederates into extended settlements of three or four separate but closely spaced sites conforms to the principle of massing for mutual defence through complementary opposition. Spatially, the three pioneer Quiche ridgetop settlements are spaced only 2–3 km apart in a straight line (cf. Fox 1978, Map 3). As settlements grew, furthermore, urbanism for the Chontal-derived peoples (e.g. Mayapan, Chichen Itza, Utatlan, Iximche) seems to be more a function of political aggregation than specific ecological factors (e.g. strategic resources for trade, water control). That the political variable of nucleation for defence fully accounts for location and size of Postclassic communities of Chontal descent can be readily grasped by the surprising uniformity in population magnitude, irrespective of geographical setting. Urban populations for late Postclassic capitals (Mayapan, Utatlan, Tayasal, etc.) did not exceed about 15 000 persons.

Seemingly reflecting a conflict between ideal and normative behaviour, both the Quiche and Cakchiquel (Xajil 1953, p. 44) lay claim to four ancestral confederates each upon entering the highlands from the lowlands, though archaeology provides a more normative view of only three confederates each throughout much of their history. Tripartite organization seems to bespeak the more Mayan lower ranked communities of the Chontalpa, such as those of the rural ancestors of the Quiche, Cakchiquel, and Rabinal.

After relocating from the three closely spaced pioneer sites (e. g. Jaca witz) to Utatlan, the Quiche only built a fourth plaza (El Resguardo) upon receiving Toltec legitimation (see below) from a lowlands *Tollan* and the formation of the segmentary state. Throughout the Postclassic, however, both the less highly ranked Cakchiquel and Rabinal allies (in contrast to the higher status Quiche) maintained three settlement segments within their successive central communities (i.e. Patzak and Iximche for the Cakchiquel; Cahyup and Chuitinamit for the Rabinal, Fox 1978).



### Successive tripartite tiers

True to the *modus operandi* of the lower ranked Chontal militaristic-oriented confederates, successive tripartite groups were added to the segmentary state through apparent complementary opposition. At the commencement of the state, the Quiche thus brought together the Cakchiquel and Rabinal (also of Chontalpa ancestry and also ensconced in nearby mountain enclaves (Paraxone and Tzameneb, respectively) to the Quiche grouping around Jacawitz. This new state level tripartite alliance soon expanded, through military conquest but cemented through marriage ties, against the *tierra caliente* river-valleydwelling peoples, again of Chontal heritage (i.e. the 'acropolis' communities: the Agaab of Sacapulas, Sajcabaja, and Cawinal were one tripartite grouping; the Balamija, Akajal, and Uspantec were another). With regard to materialistic considerations, the acropolis peoples constituted the most powerful political systems in the highlands in their location in the lucrative river/lake basins.

The upland confederacy of Quiche, Cakchiquel, and Rabinal also followed fairly orthodox segmentary political principles of complementary opposition with the acropolis peoples, who also would have been kinsmen. Accordingly, the Quiche linked first with their closest kinsmen (Cakchiquel, Rabinal) in opposition to peoples one step further removed genealogically, the acropolis communities. But as these more distantly related peoples were brought into political synchronization as 'tribute' paying provinces a more hierarchical segmentary state evolved.

When the Quiche came to control the bastion of Sacapulas, headed by both the more 'aristocratic' Toltec' descended Xiu and Canil lineages at Tuja, the Nima Quiche established a perfectly quadripartite division by then including the Tzutuja kinship segment, and thus the full 'Mexican ideal'. This also marks the time that the Quiche were promoted to a fully legitimate Toltec' state. Accordingly, the Quiche were granted a Toltec character and sacred icon with the journey of the Quiche prince C'onache to the lowland *Tollan* in the Chontalpa (apparently Xicalango or Potonchan). The next Quiche ruler, the eponymous Cotuja of the Quichean chronicles, was also the first Quiche ruler to assume the new office of *Ajpop*, or king, created by edict at *Tollan* by the ruler Nacxit.

### Geneaology and geography

But at its apogee, again true to segmentary form, upon subjugation of most of the Guatemalan highlands and coast, the tripartite state-nucleus broke apart. At this time, the Cakchiquel threw off the yoke of Quiche hegemony and migrated to Iximche, where they began a rival state system by coupling with the Akajal (a river-valley acropolis centre). A similar case can be made that the Rabinal broke loose from Quiche domination, and coupled with the Agaab of Cawinal to form their own short-lived political system, but only soon to fall prey to the Cakchiquel-continued 'imperialism' (Fox 1981, 1987). The Quiche were able to retain sovereignty over the Sacapultec/Agaab (Tujalja), with whom they had coupled in

a special relationship, apparently through intermarriage with more direct Toltec major lineages (e.g. Toltecat, QuetzalSerpent, and Xiu).

True to segmentary lineage principles as well, the Sacapultec were now also geographically closer to the Quiche, at 30 km, than the other subordinate 'allies'. The Sacapultec also exemplified quadripartite massing on both the community (i.e. four different sites) and subcommunity (i.e. major lineage) levels. But true to the autonomy-gravitating tendencies of political segments on a variety of levels (e.g. the revolt of the Ilocab and Tukuche, above), the major confederates of the Quiche state eventually pulled away to initiate smaller rival states of their own. In the process, the fragmentation of the Quiche state thus parallels the dissolution of the 'joint government' of Mayapan (*Chilam Balam of Chumayel* 1949,1, p. 137) into about 16 petty states of Yucatan (Roys 1957), which seem to have controlled territories of comparable size to the various late or secondary Quichean states (e.g. Rabinal, Balamija, Uspantec; with the Quiche core state roughly comparable in size to lowland Mani).

### **Control of provinces and fragmentation**

In a broad perspective, the Quiche colonies were tied to the centre (Utatlan) only by kinship loyalty. That is, for the Quiche as a case in point, the newly arrived administrators were offspring of Utatlan's 'lords'. From the segmentary-lineage vantage point, one's closest kinsmen and thus political allies became the administrators with suitable allegiances. But since there was little economic differentiation binding territories 'organically', it stood to reason that provincial fidelities to the centre weakened with time. According to the segmentary-lineage model the principal 'cement' forging wider amalgamations was the necessity to overcome commonly held enemies. When such threats were sufficiently neutralized, as when the Vukamak or acropolis peoples became intermarried with the Quiche, the need for continuous 'massing' lessened, and resistance to the inherent inequality of centralized authority resurfaced. Theoretically, at least, evolution to the more highly centralized 'unitary state' (cf. Service 1962, 1975) could occur only after the option for segments to regain autonomy through flight was removed. However, such political metamorphosis appears to be embedded in social matrices of greater population density and economic specialization, both correlates of more intensive cultivation and features which occur more along a gradient towards organic solidarity than along the Quiche's more mechanical solidarity-like kinship segments. Because such organic solidarity was not the case in Late Postclassic Eastern Mesoamerica, the histories are rife with tales of migration, military victories, state formation, and collapse. These remained small states, rather than the more bureaucratized 'unitary' states so commonplace in the theoretical literature.

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*A cycle of development and decline in the early phases of civilization in Palestine: an analysis of the Intermediate Bronze Period (2200–2000 BC)*

TALIA SHAY

**Introduction**

The third millennium BC witnessed a cycle of development and decline of urban culture in Palestine. The archaeological evidence indicates that Palestine first became urbanized during the third millennium. During that period, called the Early Bronze, settlement in the country tended to be centralized, with the inhabitants living in densely populated and planned towns containing monumental architecture and surrounded by thick defensive walls. The Early Bronze subsistence pattern was chiefly based on agriculture and pastoralism, and the technology of the age was well advanced. There is considerable archaeological evidence as well of international trade, art production, and developed religious institutions. All these features indicate that Early Bronze society in Palestine had attained a considerable level of complexity (Dever 1980, p. 56). The urban development of Palestine terminated during the 24th century BC.

The archaeological record of what followed, during the Intermediate Bronze period 2200–2000 BC reveals the emergence of a very different mode of existence. Although the population was sizable, human settlement tended to be dispersed and located in marginal areas. There is little evidence of architecture, monumental buildings, or defensive walls. The subsistence pattern seems to have been based on herding and on seasonal or, occasionally, yearround agriculture. Technology, too, was somewhat different, with metalwork, for example, being more in evidence than in the preceding period. However, there is little evidence of international trade, art production, or religious institutions (Prag 1974, p. 73). The structure of society appears to have been egalitarian (Shay 1983, p. 36).

**Theoretical background: definition of social change**

The archaeological material accumulated about both periods is substantial. Nevertheless, there is little stratigraphic evidence for the transition from Early Bronze to Intermediate Bronze and this is responsible for some of our difficulties in understanding the transition. It seems to me that our problem in this regard today is primarily one of the inadequacy of archaeological theory concerning the

reflection of social existence in material culture, and of the failure of archaeology to develop clear and useful definitions of the characteristics of social change.

Cultural change may be explained in terms of the concept of adaptation. As Salzman (1980, pp. 1–19) has suggested, every society provides alternatives in many different areas of activity. Thus there are alternative forms of organization, production, value orientation, property control, and so on. The presence of such alternatives accounts for the variability, flexibility, and adaptability of societies. A society can therefore change in form and content by shifting from one set of institutional alternatives to another. This is not to say that all such change consists of nothing more than the emergence of an inherent aspect of society, and that there are no factors that accelerate the interaction between variables, thereby prompting further change. Rather, in many cases changes take place slowly and gradually, and these are more under society's control and less disruptive than had been previously believed. It has been pointed out by Redman (1978, p. 10) that under conditions of extreme pressure, a culture may for a time concentrate its energies on pursuing only one of the many paths available to it. But it must quickly recover its flexibility in choosing among alternatives if it is to cope successfully with whatever changing circumstances it may face in the future. If we regard change to be an assertion of societal continuity in new circumstances (M.E. Smith 1982), then to explain it we have to trace the relationships between the set of variables involved in the process of change and the observed outcome of a particular change.

### **The hypothetical explanations of the transition from Early to Intermediate Bronze**

The preceding theoretical discussion sets out the grounds for three hypotheses I shall now consider, two of which have been proposed by others and one by myself.

The first is the 'invasion hypothesis' which exists in a number of versions, all of which regard the cultural transformation from Early to Intermediate Bronze as being the result of the violent destruction of Early Bronze towns in the wake of invasions by either West Semitic Amorites or Transcaucasian Kurgans, or by Egyptian military incursions. These proposals derive from the historical diffusionist approach, which had dominated archaeological thinking in the past, and in accordance with which the transformations that took place in the history of Palestine were explained as originating in population movements or foreign military incursions. Such interpretations were based, as well, upon the supposedly intrusive appearance of material from Intermediate Bronze, whose producers were regarded as being identified in contemporaneous texts of northern or Egyptian origin.

This view has pervaded the literature for 50 years, and has enjoyed the unquestioning acceptance of many scholars. Recently, however, it has been challenged mainly on the grounds of evidence found both in material culture and in skeletal remains (P. Smith 1982) that points to the persistence of earlier elements in Palestine during Intermediate Bronze. Thus the apparently foreign character of the material is now regarded by some scholars as actually representing cultural contacts between Palestine and Syria. Moreover, the invasion hypothesis itself is not substantiated in the archaeological

evidence, which indicates that only a few sites in the country were in fact destroyed at the end of the Early Bronze period in 2400 BC, and that the rest were either abandoned at about this time or had ceased to exist much earlier, by the end of the 26th century BC. At all events, the invasion hypothesis and its refutation are too well known in the literature to require further comment or elaboration from me (Callaway 1978, Dever 1980, Richard 1980, Vaux 1966, Wright 1971).

The second hypothesis to be considered proposes that the decline of urban culture in the Early Bronze period was the result of the cumulative influence of two factors acting singly or in concert: (a) deterioration of climate, and (b) impoverishment of soil brought about by human agricultural activities (Gophna 1982, p. 119).

The first of these propositions is based on geological and paleobotanical studies which indicate that there was a period of desiccation during the second half of the third millennium in Egypt (Bell 1971, Butzer 1959, 1960, 1965, 1966), in Iran (Wright 1966), possibly in Anatolia (Burg 1967) and in Palestine (Fargo 1979, pp. 25–6, Horowitz 1974, 1979, pp. 254, 344, Neev & Emery 1967, pp. 28–9).

To test the proposition of the effect of climatic change on culture from the point of view of archaeology, I have used a model in which shifts in climate have a more decisive influence on marginal areas than on fertile ones, where they tend to act merely as a stimulus of economic response when the sociocultural system has already been weakened (Parry 1978). Following this model, I have investigated the various ecological regions of Palestine and found that 74 per cent of the settlements located in the marginal zones had ceased to exist at about the end of Early Bronze II (2600 BC) whereas 67 per cent of those in the more fertile zones survived into Early Bronze III (2600–2400 BC; Broshi & Gophna 1984).

The possibility of the abandonment of settlements in the marginal zones of the country having occurred at more or less the same time as a shift to drier climatic conditions in the middle of the third millennium BC lends partial support to the proposition of the influence of climatic alterations upon cultural change in the country. However, since Palestine is ecologically highly variable, this explanation cannot account for the termination of Early Bronze culture in the more fertile zones, where climatic fluctuation would have had less significance and, therefore, could not alone have been responsible for the cultural decline throughout the country during that period. Quite apart from the insufficiencies of the archaeological evidence in support of the hypothesis of climatic change in Palestine, there also exists paleobotanic data from the Dead Sea plain in Jordan which are regarded by some scholars to rule out such change (Rast & Schaub 1980, 52 ff.).

Controversial, as well, is the second proposition of the hypothesis that the eclipse of Early Bronze culture was the result of environmental deterioration due to human activity. Archaeological evidence indicates that at the end of Early Bronze I (2800 BC) there was a shift of the settlements of the Coastal Plain eastwards to the hills of the Shefela. This shift must have brought about at least a partial clearing of natural vegetation (Gophna 1974, p. 160).

The question is, however, whether the clearing of the native vegetation on the hills during the Early Bronze was sufficiently great to have started the almost irreversible process of denudation that gave the area its present appearance, or whether the erosion



that took place at that time was still moderate. Kenyon (1960, pp. 2–3, 1965, pp. 8–10) interpreted the missing roofs of the Proto-Urban and Early Bronze tombs in Jericho as indicating that considerable denudation had taken place at the end of the Early Bronze period. This erosion was deduced as having resulted from deforestation which had been carried out earlier in order to clear new fields for cultivation, and which must have caused a gradual lowering of the water table that accounted, in turn, for the gypsum deposit in one of the above-mentioned tombs in Jericho.

As opposed to the conjectures concerning denudation at the end of the Early Bronze period, Rowton (1967a, pp. 109–14, 1967b) offers evidence deriving from historical documents that forests continued to flourish in the Near East, including in the area of Palestine, up until the end of the second millennium BC and even much later.

Therefore, to sum up, although evidence does exist of possible climatic deterioration and soil impoverishment in Palestine during the period in question, the data put forward in support of both cases are not substantial enough to be conclusive, so that these two issues will require further study before the validity of the second hypothesis can be finally determined in respect of either of its propositions.

Since there seems to be no unequivocal evidence to support the invasion hypothesis, and since the two propositions of the environmental hypothesis fail to explain the total collapse of Early Bronze culture, I would like to postulate a third hypothesis that is based on social organization. I would suggest that the decline of culture in Palestine came about because of the organizational system of these societies was no longer able to cope with the complex economic and social problems of the period. Consequently, social organization shifted for a time from one set of institutional alternatives, which included urbanization, to another which consisted exclusively of either pastoral nomadism or village life. The social organization hypothesis is linked to the conception already discussed that cultural change is an assertion of societal continuity in new circumstances. Nevertheless, it has remained untested for lack of substantive archaeological evidence concerning the reflection of social existence in the material culture of the periods in question. In the absence of sufficient archaeological data, I will proceed with the assumption that Early Bronze society in Palestine was patterned and systematic, and that it can therefore be compared with cross-cultural models in order to be interpreted more efficiently.

A cyclical model of development and decline can be employed to reconstruct the pattern of Early Bronze culture in Palestine. The model describes a system in which the same factors that account for its success also sow the seeds of decline when it confronts changing conditions which have emerged either from within the society or are imposed from the outside. This model has been employed in regard to developments in Mesopotamia, where its application is not merely conjectural but is supported by textual records (Gibson 1976, pp. 55–6, Yoffee 1977, pp. 147–9).

Following this model, I have attempted to reconstruct the process of cultural change that took place at the end of the third millennium. Initially this process may have possibly involved a stage of cultural involution; that is to say, an internal elaboration of cultural patterns that have become fixed. This process may have taken place during Early Bronze III, following the apogee of civilization reached in Early Bronze II.

The cultural waning in Early Bronze III is primarily reflected in a reduction of the country's inhabited area, which had decreased by 40 per cent from what it had been in Early Bronze II (Beit Arie 1984, Gal 1980, pp. 71–3, Vaux 1966, p. 28, Wright 1971, p. 285).

As I have already observed, the abandoned settlements were primarily located in the marginal areas, which may have suffered a deterioration of climate or soil, or even been subject to the effects of both. Many of the deserted settlements were branch villages and small towns (Beit Arie 1984, Epstein & Gutman 1972, p. 245, Gal 1980, p. 71) that were linked economically, politically, or by kinship with the major settlements. Their fall must have created economic problems by reducing the resources of the parent settlements. It must also have created serious social disruptions, for some of the former inhabitants of the branch settlements must have had the option of returning to the primary communities, which were probably already densely populated. Another option that may have been available to them was pastoralism. So far, however, no traces of either development have been uncovered for Early Bronze III.

The process of cultural involution during Early Bronze III may also be reflected in the cessation of trade between Egypt and Palestine beginning at the close of Early Bronze II, as has been suggested by some scholars (Richard 1980, p. 25). This would have had a serious effect on the economy of the country. Others, however, disagree with this early date for the falling off of trade between the two regions (Callaway 1978, p. 47, Hennessy 1967, p. 88) and suggest that this occurred only at the end of the Old Kingdom (c. 2200 BC). At any rate, with the shrinking of urban territories to the fertile areas during Early Bronze III, the competition between neighbouring cities must have become sharp and bitter. So, for example, the enormous fortifications of Tel Yarmut in the Shefela may have been erected in response to hostilities that developed in such circumstances (Miroschedji 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985).

Unable to adjust to changing economic, social, and political conditions, Early Bronze cities collapsed, and their inhabitants would seem to have been faced by a choice between two alternatives: either to take up the life of pastoral nomads, or to move to villages with economies based on year-round agriculture. Since both of these alternatives were already known and had been practised during the Early Bronze period (Levi 1983, p. 15, Wright 1971, pp. 286–7), they continued to be pursued during the Intermediate Bronze while coping with the changing circumstances.

Extensive archaeological evidence has been found from the period for the existence of pastoral nomadism, which then depended on a diversified economy of husbandry combined with dry-land farming of winter cereals, and with some trade. It was also characterized by regular patterns of movement adjusted to the seasonal availability of grazing land and water (Cohen & Dever 1979, pp. 48–59, 1980, p. 39, Hoft 1969, p. 356, Kenyon 1965, pp. 694–703, Prag 1974, pp. 70–102). The second alternative, that of sedentary existence based on agriculture, is also known from the same period (Eisenberg 1980, p. 12, Prag 1974, p. 74, Vaux 1966, p. 30). Thus it would appear that out of the multicultural competence of the Early Bronze system, Intermediate Bronze culture specialized in those alternatives that were best suited to the particular circumstances with which it had to cope.

### Summary

The third millennium BC witnessed a cycle of development and decline of urban culture in Palestine. The change that marked the shift from cultural development to decline, however sudden and dramatic its emergence may have been in the last two centuries of the third millennium, was in fact the outcome of cumulative pressures coming to bear on the sociocultural system. That system, which initially contributed to the success of Early Bronze culture, was subsequently unable to cope with the changing conditions with which it was confronted, and ultimately collapsed.

### Acknowledgement

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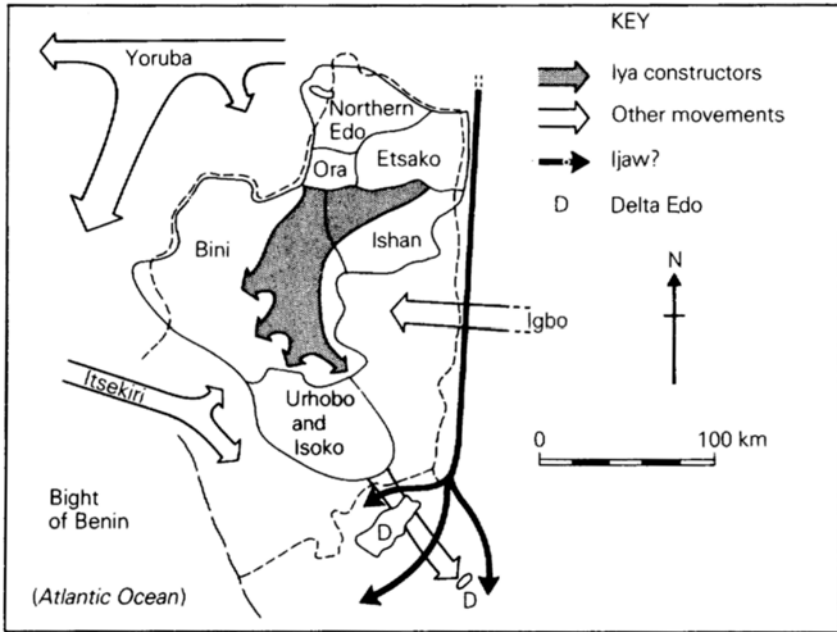
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*Emerging towns in Benin and Ishan (Nigeria)*  
*AD 500–1500*

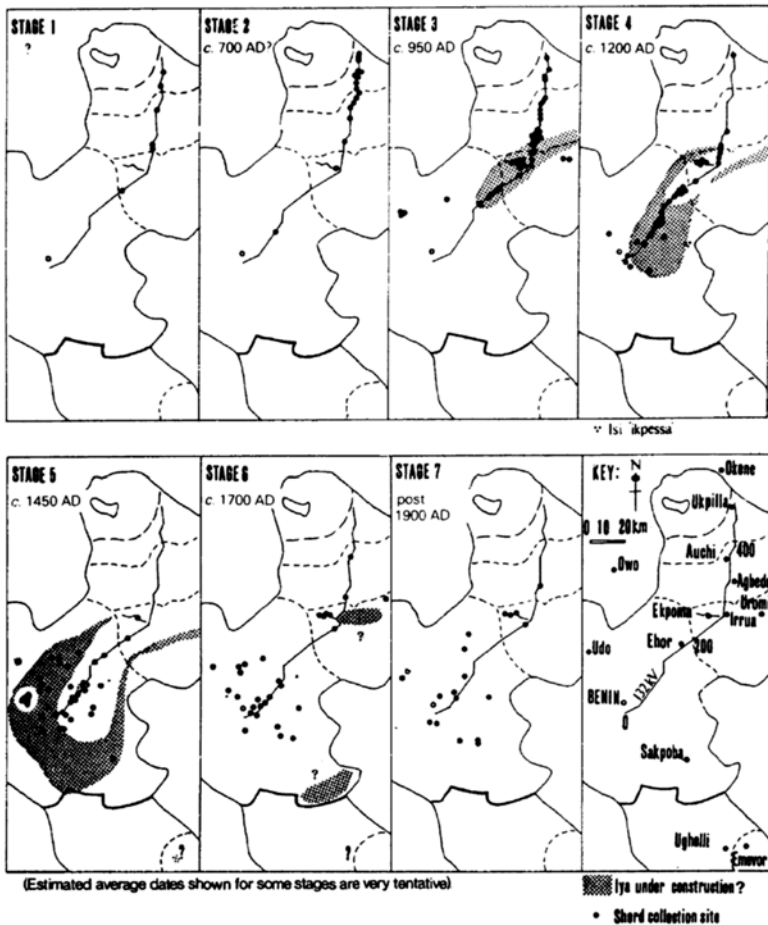
P.J.DARLING

The coffee-table book syndrome has afflicted Benin more than most old African kingdoms. Concentrating on superb photographs of bronze heads and plaques from the former palace, such books have usually paid little attention to updating barely disguised paraphrases of Egharevba's version of Benin oral history collected several decades ago. To some extent these books accurately reflect the past pattern of historical scholarship with its strong museum-based emphasis on a critical appraisal of Benin palace art and the centralized City polity, rather than on what was happening to the majority of the population in the hinterland. Colonial intelligence reports of the 1920s and 1930s from these areas remained largely confidential; and it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that a wider and firmer footing was found for Benin history following the efforts of Bradbury (1957), Connah (1975), Dark (1973), and Ryder (1969), who worked with Benin's ethnography, archaeology, art history, and historical documentation, respectively. The history, though, was still predominantly dynastic and so remained centred on Benin City. Yet one secondary consequence of this upsurge of new work into Benin history was to inspire more research into the hinterlands through a series of direct and indirect links: under Ryder's supervision, Igbafe (1967) began his further examination of provincial intelligence reports; in the footsteps of Bradbury came Dan and Paula Ben-Amos (and later Rosen) with their useful publications on regional art, religion, and folklore in the Benin Kingdom; in the early to mid-1970s Roesse (1981) and the author (1984) independently extended Connah's surveys of linear earth boundaries adjacent to the City with sample surveys throughout the Benin and Ishan kingdoms. More recently, at Dalhousie University (Halifax, Canada), Webster (1982, 1985), Sargent (1983, 1985), Ataba (1981), and Miller (1984) have incorporated new documentary and oral data in socioeconomic analyses tracing the history of two Ishan kingdoms and Benin's early development from a segmentary redistributive chiefdom to a centralized imperial power. All these new data and fresh approaches call for a radical reappraisal of the entrenched traditional history. The purpose of this chapter is to attempt a reconstruction of about 1000 years of sociopolitical development in the Benin and Ishan areas, utilizing in particular the author's interpretation of all archaeological surveys as set against some of the ideas advanced by the Dalhousie school of thought



**Figure 8.1** Past migrations of language groups.

At present, interpretation of the area's earliest history rests on linguistic analyses of the Edo group of languages (Fig. 8.1). In and near the hilly northernmost part of this group are found some non-Edoid, unclassified Niger Congo languages—Ogori and Magongo (two villages), Akpes (four dialectically different villages), and Ukaan—and it is suspected that these may be relic languages from hill-based savannah settlements, possibly antedating the Yoruba/Edo/Igbo linguistic split variously estimated between 4000 and 10 000 years ago. The linguistic heterogeneity of both the northernmost Edoid and the Yoruba Akokoid groups emphasizes the antiquity of this area (despite claims of being refugee cultural melting-pots' and 'linguistic shatter zones'). Akintoye (1969), Udo (1970), Dalby (1977); Daniels' (1980) ramal analysis of Williamson's 20-word ists indicates a northern location for 'proto-Edo' by placing the major linguistic dichotomy between this area and the rest of the Edo speakers further south. By 2–3000 years ago Edo-speaking peoples appear to have colonized both the rain forest and the Niger Delta, although subsequent expansion by the Ijaw helped to isolate the Delta Edo enclave from other southern Edo speakers (Urhobo and Isoko languages). The part that most concerns this chapter, though, is that about 1000 years ago there appears to have been a strong southward colonization by savannah/savannah-forest ecotone Edo speakers into the rainforest. Here the more northern Edo dialect appears to have displaced or absorbed any intermediate dialects/languages, so giving rise to the strong linguistic dichotomy between then Bini/Esan and the Urhoboid languages—best depicted (but probably over-stressed) in Elugbe's 1973 analysis of Edo phonology (modified in 1979- Fig. 8.1). The archaeological

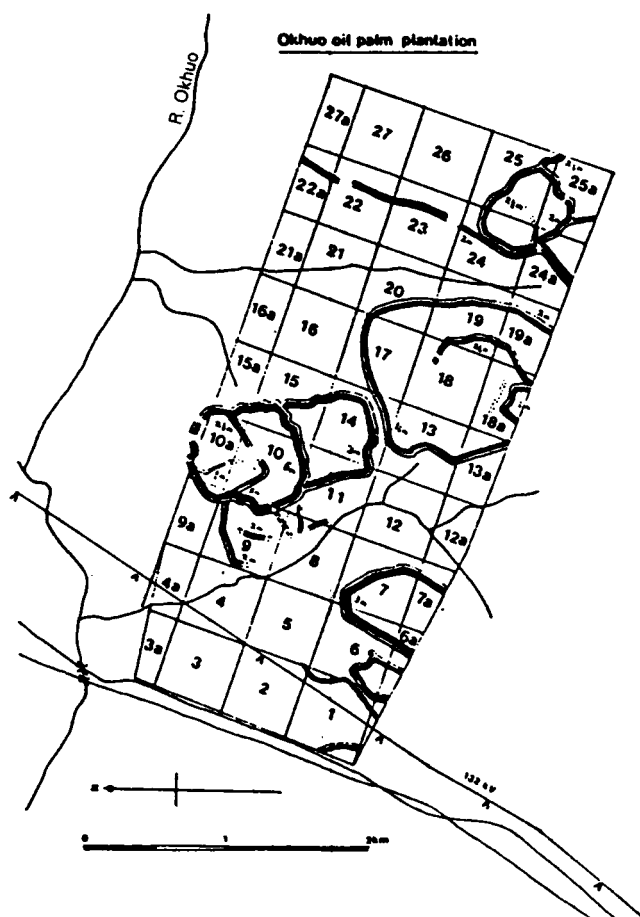


**Figure 8.2** Chronological stages obtained by analysis of Bendel State pottery sherd collections (estimated average dates shown for some stages are very tentative).

significance of all this is that a continuous network of about 16 000 km of earth boundaries (*iya*) enclose around 6500 km<sup>2</sup> of land occupied by Bini (Benin) and Esan (Ishan) speakers north of this dichotomy, whereas there is an almost total absence of them amongst the Urhobo speakers south of the dichotomy.

This north—south movement, as well as the core-periphery expansion described below was confirmed by culture sequence chronologies for over 200 pottery sherd assemblages, including those collected along a continuous 160 km transect through the Etsako savannah, the Ishan savannah-forest mosaic and the Benin Forest (Fig. 8.2). From the spatial distribution of sherd variables it would seem that the relatively static Ishan earthwork constructors maintained closer affinities with the savannah Edo to the north than with the more migratory Bini earthwork builders moving southwestwards;

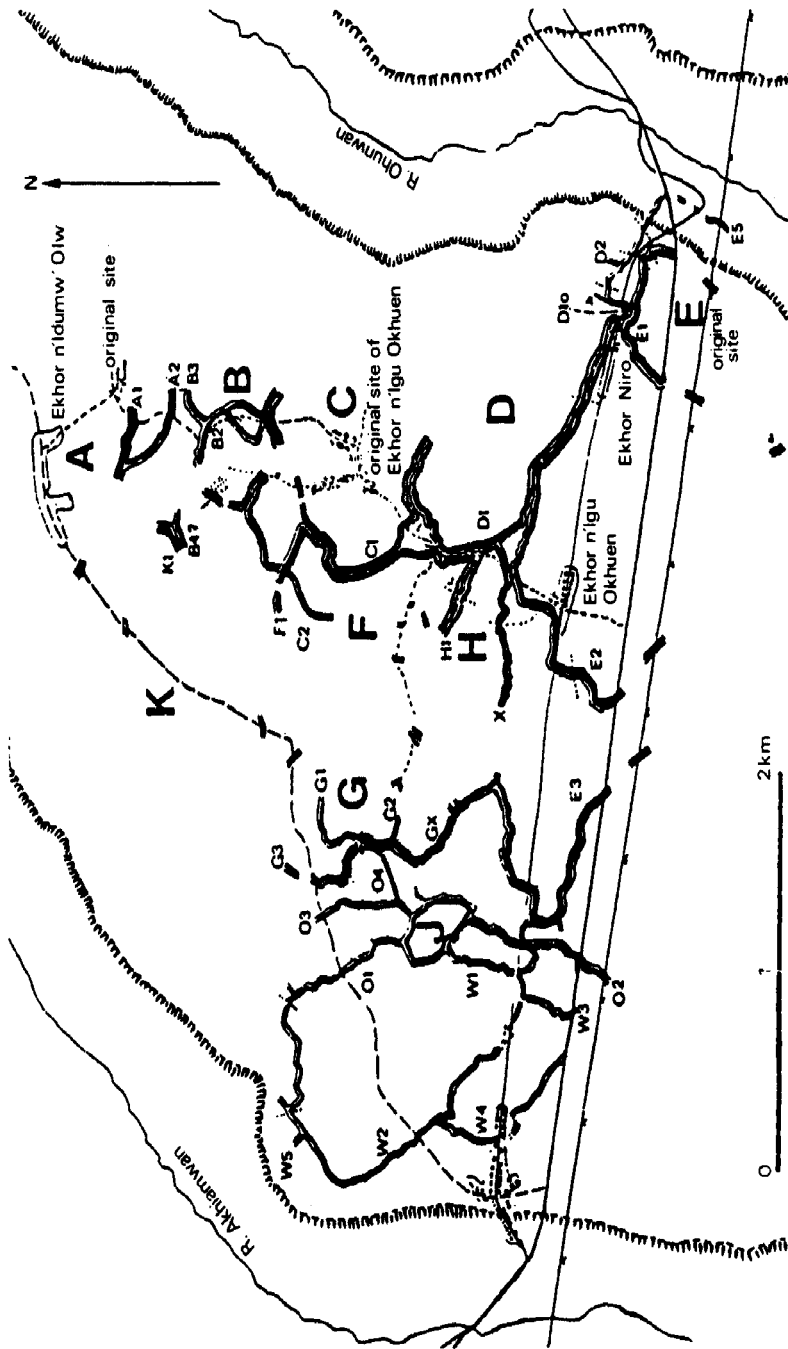




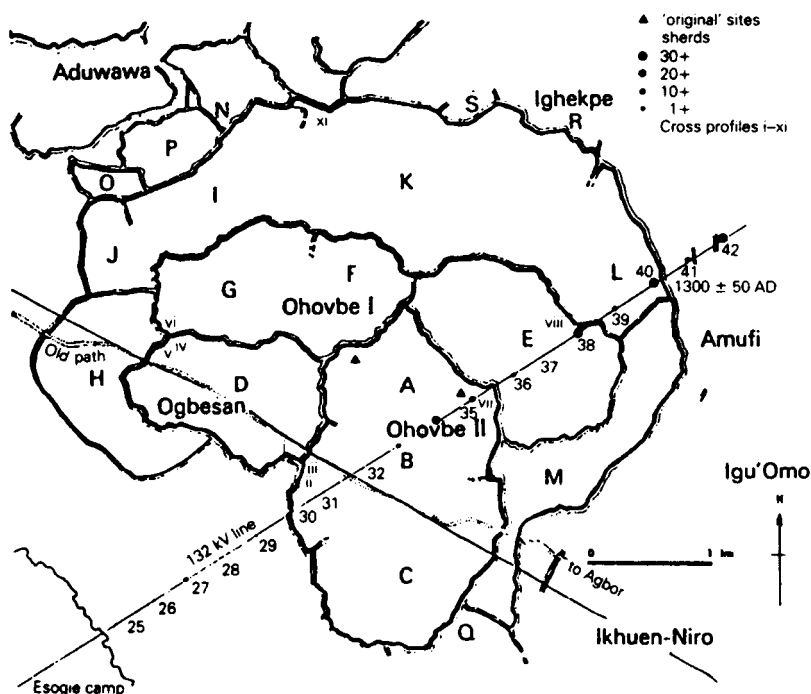
**Figure 8.3** Hilltop hamlets once enclosed the most level interfluvial areas in this heavily dissected, long-deserted area near Okhuo, nearly 40 km north-east of Benin.

perhaps, with inter-marriage as a key link in the process, the more autochthonous ceramic traditions of forest women potters (who knew the secret sites of the best potting clay and temper) held their own against traditions imported by the savannah Edo migrants. The process of Benin/Ishan cultural polarization was well advanced by the 16th century, when the Benin kingdom accepted innovations (such as Ovia cult shrine pots and the main types of carved wooden roulette decoration) with strong northern connections via Yorubaland rather than via Ishan and the savannah Edo.

Within this broad context of linguistic and pottery culture changes can now be set a fairly detailed spatial record of sociopolitical development interpreted from about 1500 km of surveyed earthwork boundaries in the Benin and Ishan kingdoms. These surveys may represent less than 10 per cent of the total lengths of linear banks and ditches clustered over about 6–7000 km<sup>2</sup> of rain forest in a complicated network



**Figure 8.4** Closely clustered primary enclosures (A–E) along the eastern part of the interfluvium, with most later territorial expansion being westward. Note narrow *cordons sanitaires* between settlement territories. Only three of the original ten settlements building primary enclosures (A–K) are in existence today.



**Figure 8.5** Ohovbe iya showing accretionary settlement enclosures within a coherent unity over three main phases of later perimeter deepening.

covering northern Ishan and eastern Benin. A distinct core-periphery zonation pattern emerges, with small primary enclosures having numerous accretionary loops and narrow strips of no-man's-land characterizing the core areas, and much larger primary enclosures with few additional enclosures and broad bands of no-man's-land being more characteristic of the periphery. Sample surveys from the different zones have been selected to illustrate a developmental sequence from small hamlets to villages, towns, cities and kingdoms (Figs 8.3–8.8). The smallest enclosures occur continuously from the savannah-forest ecotone (where they were adjacent and had few or no additions), through the dissected Okhuo area (where a few more additions are apparent; Fig. 8.3), to Isi and the Ekhör area (where tightly packed primary enclosures often superimposed their additions over former neighbours' lands in their strong colonization movement westwards; Fig. 8.4). South-west of Okhuo and west of Ekhör, the less competitive territorial growth structures of Ohovbe (A–Q, Fig. 8.5) graphically depict the development of village hierarchy as successive past satellite settlements (*idumwun*) exhibited deference to a central village authority with their common deepening of the total village earthwork boundary (*iya*) in three different phases (1st A, B, C; 2nd D, G, F, E; 3rd H, J, I, K, L, M), despite being sited discretely just within their independently constructed *iya*.

From calculations of the probable rates of natural increase, the relatively rapid formation of adjacent settlements appears to be better explained by a strong migratory wave front (Hassan) emanating from the more pressurized core areas (e.g. Figs 8.3 & 8.4), causing a lateral influx of short-distance migrants, rather than by Ohovbe's unaugmented internal population growth (Darling 1981a). Increasingly hierarchical village structures, therefore, may have been a response to the needs of short-distance migrants for territorial legitimacy and mutual defence in the pre-14th century period (carbon-14 date of AD 1300±50, Birm 952, for enclosure L).

The rapidity of this demographic change and its accompanying sociopolitical processes was such that, by the time the practice of *iya* construction reached the peripheral areas, quite sizable political allegiances between scattered *idumwun* and villages had already been established and, consequently, *iya* enclosures were considerably larger *ab initio*. Only a few kilometres west of Ohovbe lay Benin—on the periphery of the *iya* cluster it must be stressed, not in the middle. During the same pre-14th century period Benin had become a strong religious centre, as is attested by the many thousands of an ancient form of thick-walled, cup-like shrine pot, altar plinth potsherd pavements, and possibly by the mass-burial of at least 40 young women in a deep cistern (Connah 1975, pp. 117, 211 ff.).

Yet Benin was not the only large and powerful settlement in the area, nor was it the only religious centre. Other sizable *iya* enclosures on the south-west periphery have been surveyed at Uroho, Evbonikhuo, Idogbo, Oka, Ekae, Ugbeku, Egbaen, Iwu, Uwan, and Okhunmwun (Fig. 8.6). Many of these *iya* had the double profile of the core area *iya n'uwu* (two boundary *iya* of opposing villages with a narrow *cordon sanitaire* of no-man's-land between them), suggesting periphery replication of core area *iya* long after the latter's original mode of construction had been forgotten. Another hangover from earlier times, when *iya* enclosures were more lineage-based, was their partial use as exogamous boundaries, excluding male warriors but permitting the free movement of female traders (Jungwirth 1968, p. 167, Bradbury nd, BS 550/1). Leadership structures seem to have reflected the settlement patterns within the *iya*. Okhunmwun, with the largest primary *iya* surveyed (1746 ha), seems to have been led by six powerful chiefs in several settlements (Jungwirth 1968, pp. 140, 166).

Multiple settlement patterns characterized other large *iya* enclosures: Irhiri and Uroho had at least three villages each, over seven outlying villages were controlled by Idogbo with its extensive *iya* additions (2400 ha), all Benin's *Uzama* (original kingmakers) villages lay within the *iya n'Akpan* (2130 ha), and Oka's 1275 ha primary *iya* still encloses the known sites of seven scattered *idumwun*. Yet Oka is reputed to have been 'a very large town' under Ogiemabo—a fierce warrior leader whose long hair stood on end in battle—and the devolution into dispersed wards, it is claimed, took place after conquest by Benin in the late 15th century (Bradbury nd, BS 373, 588). Perhaps the term 'town' expresses more the political reality of Oka's strong defensive allegiance against a common enemy than the existence of a large nucleated settlement, even though sizeable aggregations were probably developing within some *iya* enclosures such as Utekon, Egbaen and Ekae. What matters is not so much any definition of what was or was not 'urban', but that the momentum towards urbanization was there; the dynamic processes increasing the size and complexity of sociopolitical

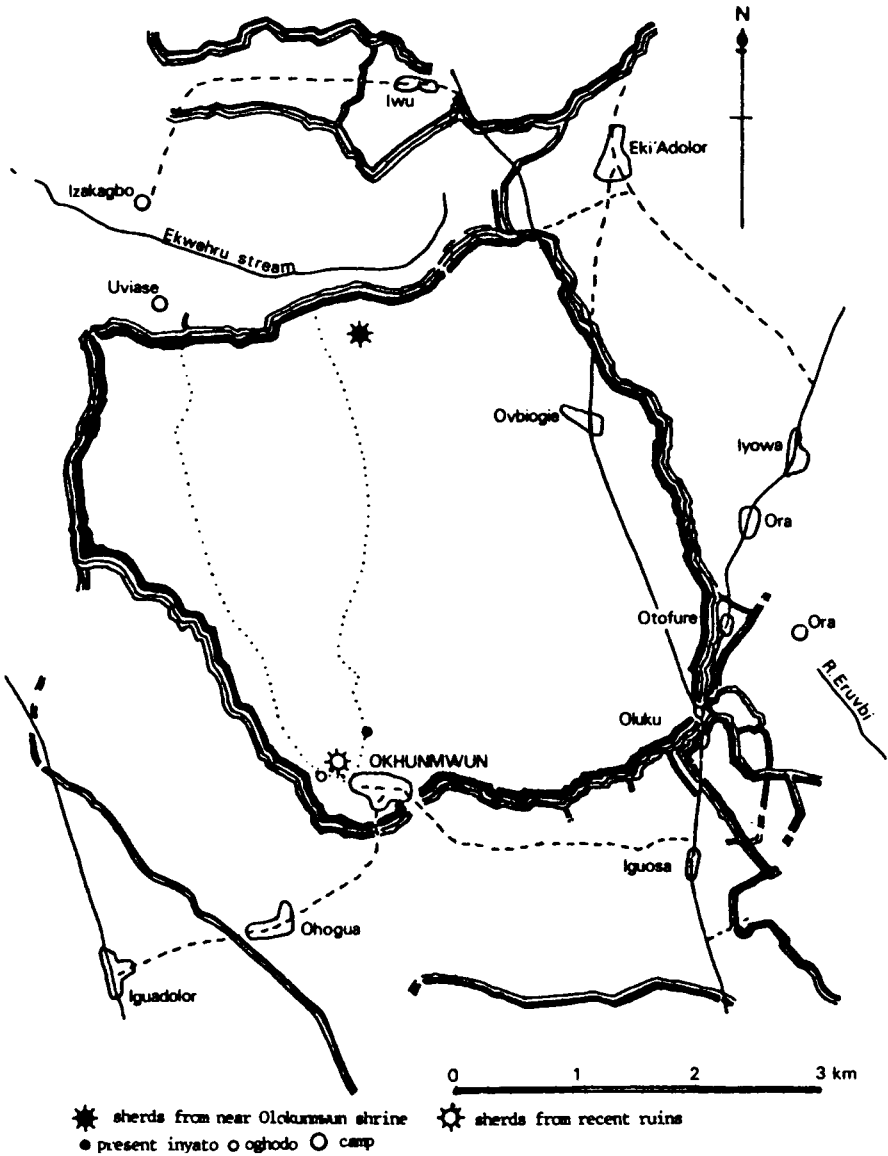


Figure 8.6 Okhunmwun iya enclosing a sizable petty chiefdom *ab initio*.

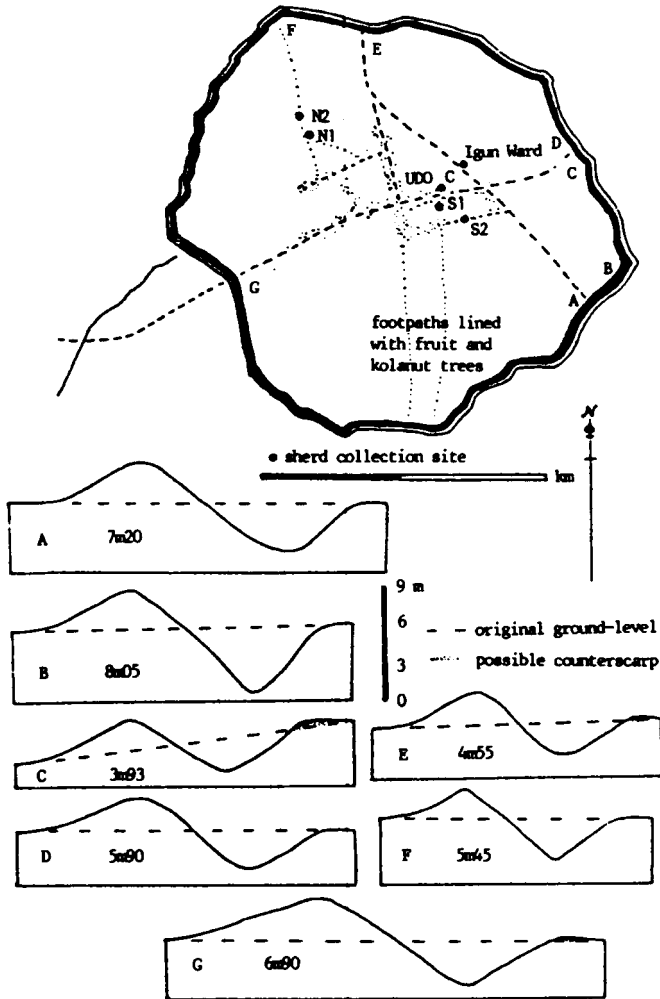
units exhibited by the *iya* continued to operate. For a time, it is true, the parity of large contiguous settlements may have created an uneasy equilibrium as each petty chiefdom sought to establish power advantages over its neighbours: Okhunmwun was busy raiding Benin for slaves to swell its population (Bradbury nd, OB15). This situation could not persist for long. Only 40 km to the north-west was the growing urban centre

of Udo (Fig. 8.7) with its powerful mini-kingdom; to the north-east and east were developing the mini-kingdoms of Ishan, such as Ekpoma (Fig. 8.8) and Uromi, whose economic expansion may have been based respectively on gold and cloth (Miller 1984); and within the area soon to be one controlled by the Benin kingdom were the Ugha, Isi, and Ughu kingdoms (Obayemi 1976). So the super-allegiance of several chiefdoms around Benin, as suggested by Connah's Benin City Walls survey, fits a much wider pattern, although Benin's spectacular rise to widespread power may have been aided by coastal slave-raiding using its canoe-port and by the influence of the mid-15th century Udo-based polity under Oba Ewuare (Darling 1981b, 1984).

The effect of Benin conquest on most emerging towns was traumatic. Their chiefs were executed, living on only as *ihen* (deified resistance heroes in provincial cults using the ancient shrine pottery types also once used in Benin; Ben-Amos 1978); their people were often redeployed to scattered settlements elsewhere; and the *Oba* (king of Benin) used special land surveyors (the *avbiogbe*) to demarcate new settlement boundaries with *ikhimwin* trees (*Newbouldia laevis*) as the *iya*, of the towns that never were, fell into disuse.

The coffee-table books love to use the more colourful oral traditions relating to this early period of Benin history, but they seldom note the implications of their inherently contradictory nature. Briefly, pressures to legitimize and conceptualize the past in terms of the Benin dynastic framework have distorted the timescale of the traditions in two main ways (apart from the usual telescoping and typecasting). First, events which happened before Benin's rise to power have been placed in dynastic contexts much later than they occurred. For example, although most *iya* were almost certainly pre-dynastic, traditions are almost unanimous in ascribing them to the late 14th century *Oba* Oguola, a few were built against the late 15th century *Oba* Ozolua of Benin, but only two reflect the pre-dynastic situation (Bradbury nd, BS 393, 221, 44, 492). Similarly, traditions date the main Benin City wall to the late 14th century *Oba* Oguola, the mid-15th century *Oba* Ewuare, or the early 16th century *Oba* Esigie. The Ewuare version predominates today owing to Egharevba's uncited use and popularization of only part of Talbot's relevant text; yet Benin's coronation ceremony enacts *Oba* Ewedo's early 14th century entry into Benin City with a ritualized canoe crossing at the City Wall, thereby implying a pre-14th century date for the rampart (Roth 1903, pp. 190–1, Talbot 1926, Vol. I, pp. 154–5, Bradbury nd, BS 10). Secondly, Benin's territorial and political rights have been transposed back in time to legitimize later conquests—now termed 'rebellions'—within its subsequent kingdom area. So, Okhunmwun is deemed to have 'rebelled' against Benin in the late 15th century despite having no traditions of previous conquest or allegiance; and Udo—an independent rival kingdom until its early 16th century conquest by Benin—is regarded as having been rebellious since *Ogiso* (pre-dynastic) times and reputedly was conquered over two centuries by the typecast *Obas* Oguola, Ewuare, Ozolua and Esigie, if all the traditions are to be believed (Igbafe 1967: 5, Egharevba 1934, p. 22, 1953, pp. 14–15, 1968, pp. 11, 24, 26–7, Bradbury nd, BDR 63).

Legitimacy over the Ishan peoples was achieved by claiming them to be Bini refugees; although the traditional cause of their flight is unconvincing and muddled with late 17th century events, as well as being unsupported by data from linguistics,



**Figure 8.7** Dump rampart around the old city of Udo, finally defeated by Benin in about 1517. The absence of rural earthworks in the former Udo kingdom area is an indication of significant cultural differences with the Bini/Esan speaking areas. Udo may have been involved in the *Oba* dynasty at Benin.

pottery sherds or the timescale needed for *iya* construction (Bradbury 1973, p. 29). One final caveat concerns the nature of the first-hand material from which so much of Benin's history has been reconstructed. This is well exemplified by the mythical attributes of Okhunmwun's six leaders: Iya the digger of ramparts, Ovbivbi with power over the weather, Ogi and his 14 warrior dogs, the titanic Ososo, Olokhun with wasps and bees in his beard, and Egbomwanran whose boa-like penis was carried by a troop

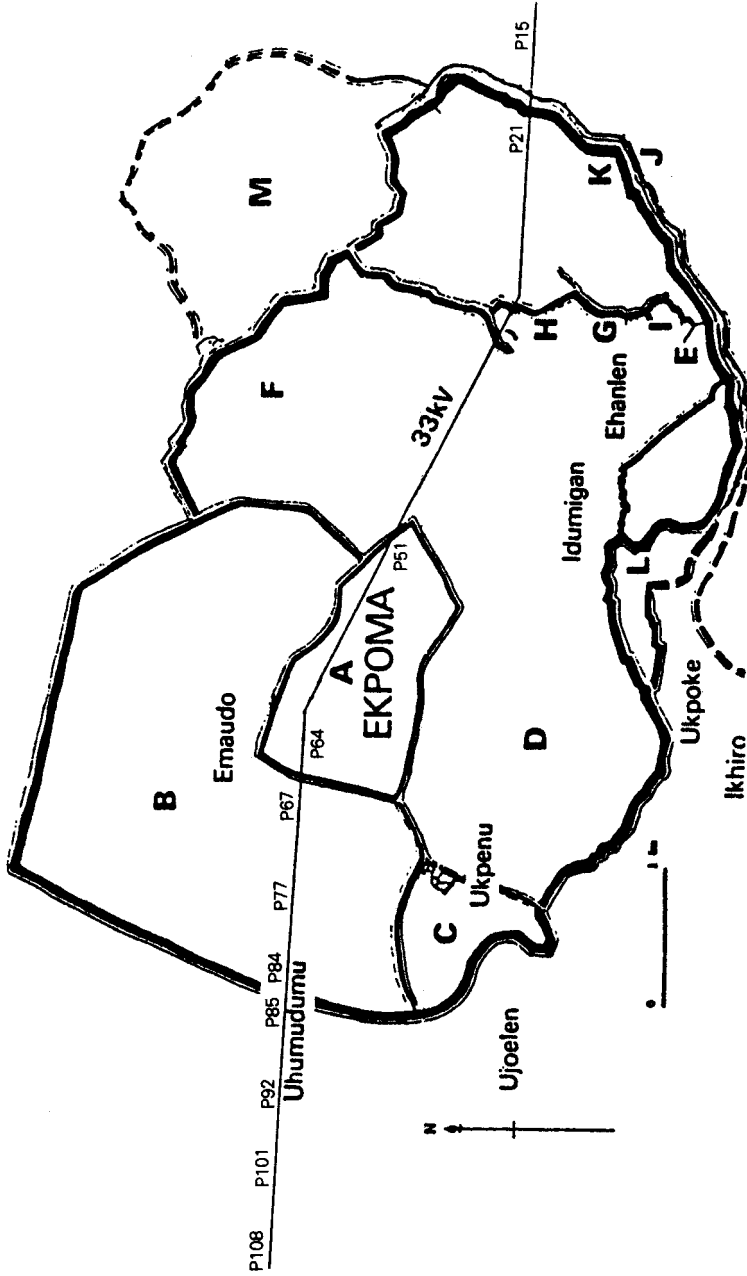
of people (Jungwirth 1968, p. 166). To produce either literal or interpretative history from such data is obviously fraught with danger.

Sargent's socio-economic analysis of early Benin history, based so closely and uncritically on Egharevba's orally derived account, therefore, was read with some initial consternation (Sargent 1983). His dating structure had been strongly influenced, but not dictated, by Ataba's somewhat literal adherence to a generation-length framework and by related circular arguments to European documentation. Even though these 'fixed dates' do not affect the controversial pre-European contact period, he builds an elaborate analytical superstructure for both Benin and Middle Belt Kingdoms on this weak base, sometimes even supporting his arguments for specific early periods with data relating to much later times. Having said that, though, his overall projection of Webster's analysis on to Benin dynastic history provides a compelling developmental sequence from a segmentary redistributive social formation to a centralized tributary state, which created the necessary élitist demand to form a subsequent trading state with a growing rôle in long-distance commerce; then came the conquest state phase followed by consolidation into an imperial trading formation. Some of the impacts of these developments, he argues, were the intensive development of the élitist enclave in Benin City at the expense of the surrounding hinterland, the introduction of new forms of tribute payment and *ad hoc* levies, and the centralization of chieftaincy aspirations with the consequent devolution of leadership and even *otu* (age-grade) structures at the local level.

By reason of being largely undated, most of the recent archaeological survey work permits interpretations flexible enough to accommodate much of Sargent's, Miller's, and Webster's analyses, particularly for the later dynastic period. The cornering of markets for gold and cloth may help to explain the extraordinary territorial growth of Ekpoma and Uromi *iyala*—the latter reflecting the spatial organization of the war groups *Okhiode* (centre), *Obinuan* (left flank), *Obehrun* (right flank). The canoe-port complex easily fits a pattern of expanding coastal trade; and small, inward-facing enclosures along Benin's waterside routes might best be explained as staging posts for incoming slaves—and arguments can be advanced to link the fortunes of the top Benin chiefs with the control, first of these routes (*Oshodin*, *Uwangue*), then of the inland army (*Ezomo*), then of the internal political scene (*Iyase*). Linking up with Sargent's ideas about tribute, the *iya* also provide a tangible framework for calculating possible levels of tribute as well as correlated local population densities (Darling 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 180 ff.).

Serious conflicts arise, however, when attempting either to interpolate sequential developments (inferred from the pre-dynastic *iya* patterns) forward into the dynastic era, or to extrapolate socio-economic processes (based on dynastic oral traditions) back into the pre- and early dynastic periods. In part these problems may arise from these unidirectional, evolutionary models being applied too deterministically: most patterns of long-term processes appear more temptingly logical than the often disordered events of historical reality. Despite this, neither Webster (1986, pers. comm.) nor myself accept Sargent's (1983, p. 16) extrapolation of tribute processes back into the predynastic period, whereby Benin is envisaged as receiving minimum allegiance tribute from such distant centres as Owo, Akure, and Idah before the 14th





**Figure 8.8** The Ishan mini-kingdom of Ekpoma controlled independently enclosed settlements over an area ten times greater than that demarcated by the original chiefdom earthworks. Linguistic evidence suggests that Benin and Ishan may have polarized about 1000 years ago.

century. Similarly, apart from the remarkably persistent phenomenon of settlement territoriality, little remained of the pre-dynastic processes accompanying *iya* construction after Benin's conquest phase in the mid—late 15th century: local chieftaincy structures devolved, boundary earthworks were replaced by trees, and many incipient urban centres—rapidly nucleating in response to increasing internecine stress—suffered a sharp reversal of their previous trends, as Benin's expansive conquests led to their dispersal, elimination, or sudden reversion to rural village status.

The real problems, therefore, centre on the controversial early 'dynastic' period (i.e. between Oranmiyan and Oba Ewuare—around the 14th to mid-15th century). Previously unconsidered traditions collected over 80 years ago from Prince Aigubasimwin (later Oba Eweka II) reinforce the enigma about the nature and extent of Benin control during this stage. If the 'harder' archaeological data are accorded precedence over oral data, then interpretation must concentrate on the most relevant features dating to this period: the large shrine and mass burial excavated by Connah in separate sites within Benin City. These features could indicate the existence of a fairly extensive Benin-based religious network at this time; but one cannot be sure to what extent religious cults reflected political allegiance and tribute payment. There are, however, two much more powerful constraints against linking this archaeological data with support for Sargent's state development perspective. The first is the evidence of numerous other contemporaneous religious cults within the later kingdom area, as reflected by today's worship of the *ihen* (hero-deities), which record their conquest by Benin under Obas Ewuare and Ozolua in the mid-late 15th century. The second is the data pointing strongly to the total destruction and deliberate removal of the shrine in about the mid-15th century (Darling 1984, pp. 273–5). Taken together, these constraints seriously limit the probable extent of Benin's religious network at that time, they effectively destroy arguments favouring a process of gradually increasing politicoreligious control, and, instead, they suggest that the main changes took place at the end of the period under discussion and that these changes were large scale and traumatic. If the reconstruction of this period combines the evidence of the *ihen* with that of the *iya* surveys, then the closest correlation of cult worship areas with *iya* boundaries occurs along the south-west periphery of the total *iya* cluster—at Oka, Ekae, Ogba, Egbaen, Utekon, Okhunmwun, Iwu—suggesting that this is where *iya* construction was taking place at this time. So the major orientation of society was still fragmented in *iya*-based petty chiefdoms until the traumatic changes of the mid-15th century.

The orthodox dynastic traditions of Benin record this period rather differently, and their long-established authority on the academic scene challenges the precedence I have given to interpretations based on archaeological data. Yet the oral traditions which relate to this period are at times 'obscure' and ruled by 'shadowy beings' (Ryder 1969, pp. 7–8). Some of their details, such as Oranmiyan's entry on Benin land from the Ovia not the Siluko river, appear to be a realistic reflection of pre—15th century times. Others, such as Ewedo's accession, have left their imprint on Benin palace ceremonial. Yet, when the Oguola *iya* construction traditions were subjected to rigorous testing, the conclusion was that 'the degree of historical unreliability seems to increase with the level of unanimity', primarily because Benin dynastic traditions suffer from the

necessity of having to express pre-dynastic events in dynastic terms (Darling 1984, pp. 34–44). What is perhaps more disconcerting is that other sources permit credible alternative scenarios quite different from the official versions, the Ife-oriented, Udo-based conquest of Benin by Oba Ewuare in the mid-15th century being one of the more convincing (Darling 1984, pp. 143–67). Whatever the case, even as the iya symbolically enclosed the real physical world against the unseen spirit world, so the major points of dispute lie not so much in the interpretation of hard archaeological data as in the more nebulous conjecture about those processes which, forgotten in defeat, left behind no structures.

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## *Control of resources in the medieval period*

C.G.HARFIELD

The way in which economic resources were controlled and manipulated in the medieval period is the key to understanding the structure and mechanisms of feudal society. Before examining the rôle of lordship in the feudal economy it is necessary to reassess the potential contribution of different disciplines to such aims, for these require a thematic approach rather than an approach determined by individual academic disciplines.

### **The need for a broader context**

A leading historian of the Norman period of English history has argued that the rôle of the castle was an essential part of 'feudal' society (Brown 1976). Using a typological argument Brown suggests (1969a, 1969b, 1973) that the motte-and-bailey defensive earthwork is the symbol of a feudal society within the archaeological record; a base for the military activity which for him, and some others, was the *raison d'être* of feudal lordship. Davison (1969) put an alternative view to the effect that types of site other than the motte-and-bailey could have served equally well as non-communal defensible sites and that such sites can be identified in the archaeological record prior to 1066 in England as well as in Normandy, France. Brown argues that as the motte-and-bailey was introduced to England from Normandy following the conquest of 1066, feudalism and the feudal social hierarchy were therefore introduced to England at that time also.

This raises questions concerning the nature of Anglo-Saxon lordship and how it might be expressed archaeologically (Davison 1977). But what was needed then, and what is needed now, is more excavated data for the functional activities within, and associated with, defensible sites in this period. The current state of knowledge concerning these sites is biased towards constructional data which reflects the priorities of research strategies to date. Too often the exact functions of a defensive earthwork have been assumed from later documentary sources without being tested archaeologically. Time and again ramparts and mottes have been the only features excavated at such sites. The area enclosed by the ramparts, the bailey, has often been ignored and left unexcavated. Open area excavation of the baileys such as at Hen Domen (Montgomery, Wales) would do something towards redressing the data balance (Barker 1977). Until the data sample regarding internal and associated external

site activities at these sites is enlarged, the functional generalizations postulated by historians looking for general physical illustrations of specific documentary interpretations are not supported archaeologically. Thus there is a need for a broader data context concerning these sites and their identification and interpretation. Bates (1982) has noted how recent excavations in Normandy are beginning to alter the conventional wisdom regarding these sites. In some cases, excavation has resulted in interpretations quite different from the assumptions made by historians from documentary sources.

The next step is to provide an environmental context for each site in order to identify processes of interaction. Décaens's (1981) excavations at Grimbosq (Normandy, France) demonstrated that the most prominent features of the site, the defences, were secondary to the site's prime function as an economic estate centre. This interpretation was based on environmental evidence which provided clues as to the builders' intended purpose for the site, and suggested that the primary function was control of resources, and not military strategy.

That defensible sites were not always successful when used as political and administrative tools has been demonstrated by Janssen (1975) in work on the bishops of Utrecht. Janssen looked at defensible sites purely from an administrative point of view and at the way in which they constituted the framework of administrative nodes. But defensible sites should also be viewed in relation to other aspects of the medieval archaeological record. It is not enough just to understand why and how defensible sites relate to their immediate topography. It must also be clearly understood why these sites are absent when they do not occur in the archaeological record. Vencl (1985) has stressed the importance of viewing the surviving archaeological record in a context which takes into account aspects of behaviour which would not survive archaeologically. Just as it is true that defensible sites do not represent all aspects of defensive behaviour—for instance, soldiers can be deployed defensively away from any defensible sites—so it is true that because a village or group of villages do not have a defensible site there may still have been one or more lords with an interest in the village(s). Defensible sites are not the only archaeological aspect of lordship. It may be evident in other ways such as the intra-site organization of villages. Defensible sites are but one aspect of medieval lordship and unless it is understood why they do not occur with the same frequency as other sites their significance in the archaeological record is likely to be misinterpreted.

To avoid this, evidence of lordship must be researched and identified at village sites such as Wharram Percy (Yorkshire, England) where no defensible sites are located but where two (possibly three) 'manorial' complexes from the early medieval period (Saxon) to the late medieval period (c. 14th century) have already been identified (Hurst 1984). Two of these 'manorial' enclosures within the village must have been contemporary. Hurst has used the evidence of intra-site enclosures and differential pottery scatters (the 'richer' pots being confined to the larger enclosed areas within the village) to suggest status and seigneurial centres. It is further suggested that the uniform layout of the intrasite units, regardless of topography, is indicative of a single act of planned settlement which also implies lordship. Hurst interpreted this planned settlement as a result of Scandinavian immigrations in the late Anglo-Saxon period,

and such planned settlements are not only identified elsewhere in northern England (Harvey 1983) but also in Denmark at this time (Jensen 1982) and elsewhere in Europe as well (Harten & Schuyf 1983, Eigler 1983). Some form of authority organized such settlements, and as the cumulative data increase so too does the general context in which to interpret them.

Nitz (1983) argues that planned villages indicate a political strategy when viewed in a regional context; however, he does not link this idea with his use of the word 'feudal' which he uses as a chronological marker rather than defining it socially. Intra-site spatial analysis at Feddersen Wierde (Germany) gives the impression of '... a highly organized settlement with some form of class system, and probably with craftsmen who were full-time specialists' (Parker 1985). Individual plots of varying size and components, and halls with byres suggesting craft rather than animal utilization, are the basis for the interpretation of this carefully planned settlement. At Vallhager (Gotland, Sweden), contrasted with Feddersen Wierde by Parker, there is less to suggest social divisions and craft activity within the excavated record. Location (in terms of access to resource control and exchange) and available settlement area are dictated by the sociopolitical development of each community. A further context is thus apparent; that of external factors which influence settlement and social organization. Competition for space at Feddersen Wierde necessitated a strict organization of land distribution: the division of the area into tofts and crofts, which reflected the social hierarchy as seen in the archaeological record. Clearly, if such distinctions are evident at other sites then interpretations based on the recovered data should be considered in the light of regional geography, and in the light of the possibility of political strategies as postulated by Nitz.

Nitz's paper relating to the Carolingian conquest and integration of Saxony demonstrates that ordinary villages can be used as political tools just as easily as the non-communal, defensible sites from which the Normans are supposed to have ruled England. Intra-site spatial distribution and general settlement geopolitics have been little studied for this period in England. The Norman conquest of England brought not only an insertion of a new land-holding class into the overall social strata but it also brought with it some immigration to all levels of the social hierarchy, as the records of the sub-mesne under-tenants of Earl Roger of Montgomery in the Domesday Book for Shropshire indicate (Page 1908). Arising from these details, which are not always recorded in Domesday Book, are questions concerning the extent to which the Normans established new settlements or added to existing ones, and how such settlement changes may have been used to accomplish political and economic control. In areas such as the Holy Land (Benvenisti 1970) settlement differences are easy to distinguish. Rowley (1972, see also Rahtz & Rowley 1984) has demonstrated that the post-conquest settlement at Middleton Stoney (Oxfordshire, England) was in a different location from its Anglo Saxon predecessor, and similar evidence comes from some other Oxfordshire sites. But this example proves to be the exception rather than the rule in England. When the societies are as closely associated as are late Anglo-Saxon England and Normandy, cultural diffusion is not so easily distinguished from colonial integration.



The full significance of lordship evidence in Anglo-Norman England can only be assessed in the light of similar evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, and from Normandy and the rest of northern France for the same period. Some historians have argued that the Normans deliberately maintained Anglo-Saxon documentary formulae to stress continuity and William's right to the throne. Yet others argue that 'the castle' represents a fundamental change in society as a result of the conquest. Bearing in mind that official documents can be manipulated for propaganda purposes there is a rôle for archaeology to play in providing a context against which to assess social and political change. Jensen (1982) notes that excavated data and documentary data provide two different contexts in which to view the Danewirke earthwork. Documentary sources suggest it was a dramatic, sudden, urgent response whilst the interpretation of the excavated evidence points to it being part of an overall strategy over time.

A fuller understanding of the historic rôle of the individual within his or her family structure is also needed, since the nature of the inter-relationship between family bonds, and the personal service bonds which structured lordship in this period, may well have influenced behavioural patterns. For instance, exploitation of wardships is recognized in medieval history but the impact of this on family and feudal structure has yet to be studied in depth. How responsibilities between lordship bonds and family bonds were balanced is significant for the interpretation of the excavated data.

Hitherto archaeologists researching the medieval period have tended to rely too readily upon data from other disciplines such as history both to guide their research and to fill the gaps left by it. To a lesser extent the same is true of historians and their use of archaeological data. It is argued here that research into the medieval period would be better served if practitioners in each discipline concentrated on their particular disciplines and their own specific data. Once it is felt that research strategies have been sufficiently developed to maximize data recovery and interpretation from each individual discipline, then it is appropriate to approach other disciplines with a view to making comparisons upon which to base a broader picture. Such comparisons may reveal apparent contradictions between the interpretation of different data sources for a given object of study to which there is no possible solution or compromise. Archaeology's contribution to this strategy requires a better understanding of as much relevant excavated data as possible concerning the function of individual sites (e.g. defensible sites); the significance of settlement intra-site relationships; and the significance of inter-site relationships within appropriate political, economic, geographical, and ecological regions.

### **Lordship sites and the control of economic resources**

There is no point in trying to establish an 'archaeology of feudalism' because most historians have a personal interpretation about the nature of feudalism and what constitutes the most important factor in feudal society. For Ganshof (1944) at c. AD 1000 there emerged a post-Carolingian 'new feudalism' and the basis of his interpretation of feudal lordship lay in a study of the land which supported feudalism from the point of view of the legal ties associated with it. Bloch (1940), looking at economic changes and perceived attitudes, discerned two feudal ages,

lasting from *c.* 900 to *c.* 1200 and from *c.* 1200 to *c.* 1400. Duby (1953) distinguished three phases of feudal evolution in addition to the preliminary feudal-vassalage stage up to AD 1000 already recognized by Ganshof. He also distinguished between lordship over land, and lordship over rights.

To a certain extent these diverse views are products of the differing research areas investigated. A general picture of European feudalism for a fragmented Europe should not be expected (Fourquin 1970). For English historians of the 19th century (Freeman 1877–79, Round 1895), perhaps influenced by the prevailing spirit of imperial pride, the most important feature of feudalism lay in matters military, and this theme has been taken up by later scholars (Stenton 1961, Brown 1973). A rather different approach to the development of feudalism is postulated by Wickham (1984). Arguing from Marxist concepts of economic change, he suggests that the crucial element in the transformation from slavery to serfdom lay in the changing modes of production. The nature of the labour process, the extraction of surplus and the coercive force behind these two elements, were altered in response to conditions created during the final phases of the Roman Empire. Subsequent political changes were a result of the new economic conditions, which initiated changes in physical expressions. Less central tax and more surplus retained at lower social strata meant less capital available for expenditure on monumental buildings. The rise of the church offered alternative avenues of capital expenditure and physical expression. For Strayer (1965) the primary function of feudal lordship was its rôle in local government.

Clearly an attempt merely to ‘illustrate’ or ‘prove’ any or all of these hypotheses would be an unnecessarily limited and restricted use of archaeology since archaeology can also be used to examine, independently of the above, the evidence for lordship, control of resources by lords, modes of domination, and use of coercive force.

In an investigation of the economic structure of feudal society in central southern England and in Normandy, I have adopted a two-pronged approach to examine the different ways in which evidence of economic activity and organization is preserved in the excavated and documentary records. My purpose is to identify, as far as practicable, economic processes in the AngloNorman world during the 11th and 12th centuries, and also to evaluate the use and interpretation of different data sources by different disciplines. Two specific areas of investigation have been selected, the excavated record of economic activity associated with defensible sites and the documentary record of a given economic process, milling.

There is little archaeological evidence concerning economic activities and the rôle of defensible sites in the control of such activities. There are several possible reasons for this beyond the possibility that such sites did not house economic activity. Some urban defensible sites are in locations limited by upstanding buildings, for instance the sites at Bedford, Oxford, and Stamford (Baker 1975, Hassall 1976, Mahany 1977), and thus potential excavation is necessarily limited. The different economic relationship between sites and their localities in urban and rural contexts is one aspect of this study, therefore, which it may not be possible to investigate. Elsewhere (e.g. Hastings, Bramber) research has been confined to the investigation of defensive structures only (Barker & Barton 1977, Barton & Holden 1977). At Richard’s Castle (Curnow & Thompson 1969) this remained the priority despite the presence of a village

inside the bailey. The full excavation of Hen Domen (Barker 1977) did not determine whether the site had been primarily intended for military, residential, or economic activity. Given the strength of its defences and its location, a primarily military function seems more likely in this particular case. Other sites hint at security rather than defence. The Lydford ring work (Addy *man* 1965, 1966) was a secure granary; possibly a lord seeking a means of dominating the local economy. The pre-1066 phases of Sulgrave (Northamptonshire) and Goltho (Lincolnshire) were secure manor houses, security indicating status (Davison 1977, Beresford 1982). After 1066 Sulgrave remained secure but ceased to be residential. Goltho was later converted to a motte-and-bailey in the last quarter of the 11th century. At Bretteville-sur-Laize and Urville (Normandy), Décaens (1968) interpreted the ringworks within these villages as temporary military strong-points having been used for a relatively short period of time, although an alternative agricultural function seems more likely. Despite having a motte and two baileys, Grimboisq (Normandy; Décaens 1981) was interpreted as a secure, seigneurial agricultural centre. The hall, chapel, and kitchen implied status; agricultural artefacts and pollen analysis indicate cultivation following forest clearance. Garryduff (Eire; O'Kelly 1962) and Kontich (Belgium; Borremans 1964) are similar, secure agricultural sites. Craft specialization and monopolies are evident at Garranes (Eire) and Fyrkat (Denmark) (Ó'Riódáin 1941, Roesdahl 1973, see also Roesdahl 1977). These sites suggest that certain economic activities were controlled by whoever controlled the defensible sites.

That defensible or secure sites were built at all indicates lordship, the power to be able to build such sites, and the control of resources with which to construct them. Military sites may indicate the coercive force necessary to dominate modes of production, but as a symbol of superior status a secure manorial centre was just as effective. Not all defensible sites in this period had a residential function. Nor were all associated with economic activities. A monopoly of essential activities such as the smithy or the mill could be used to control modes of production performed within the village. The association between defensible sites or seigneurial enclosures excavated within or near villages and lordly economic activity needs to be tested further. If lords monopolized processes such as milling they then had an economic process to use alongside coercive force. In reviewing excavated and ethno-archaeological evidence for milling, Rahtz (1981) suggests the use of mills as instruments of feudal oppression. In the area under investigation there is relatively little excavated data pertaining to mills during the 11th and 12th centuries. However, the Domesday Book offers the opportunity to examine ownership of mills at a given point in the 'feudal' era.

Domesday statistics are subject to 11th century clerical error and 'consolidation'. Draft and final versions of the Somerset county record survive. Twentyone mills recorded in the former are not mentioned in the latter. Allowing for this, 90 per cent of mills in central southern England were held directly by lords. The 10 per cent recorded as being held by sub-tenants may ultimately have been controlled by the lords also. Those estates with mills were larger than those without mills; but the latter were more valuable (area measurements recorded in the Domesday Book are debatable but even using different means of assessing area measurements the above statement still holds true). Little economic sense can be made of this paradox, especially since 54 per

cent of those estates without mills were held by sub-tenants. It is tempting to think that what does not make economic sense today would have made seigneurial sense in the 11th century. Although it is possible that the Domesday Book hides, or misses, a crucial element in the equation, these results suggest that 11th century lords were deliberately retaining less profitable estates in order to maintain direct control and possession of mills. (It might be expected that less profitable estates would be rented out in order to guarantee a fixed return to the lord.) This, in turn, suggests that mills were an important part of seigneurial economics and the control of modes of production. Lords attempted to control food processing methods. Rahtz (1981) notes the vigour with which medieval lords acted against the use of hand-querns by the peasants living in villages owned by the lords.

Although no 11th or 12th century mills have yet been excavated in England, there is excavated evidence for 9th century Anglo-Saxon water mills at Tamworth and Old Windsor (Rahtz & Sheridan 1972, Hope-Taylor 1958). The data from both these sites have been interpreted as indicating a high social status. Tamworth contained glass windows, and Old Windsor was a multiple, vertical-wheeled complex. Persons without mills were dependent upon those with mills. A lord would need coercive force to circumvent the widespread use of hand-querns, and documentary evidence exists demonstrating that such force was indeed used, for example by the abbot of Battle Abbey against the villagers of Battle. The dues paid to lords for the use of their mills helped fund such coercive forces. Whilst economically supporting lordship, mills alone were not enough to maintain lordship and authority. They were a contribution towards the domination of resources and the extraction of surplus to support lordship.

The demonstrable use of economic surplus—conspicuous consumption—is a form of social expression reflecting perceived status and conveying to others an indication of rank based on control of resources. Through patronage of the Church and churches, both baronial and manorial lords could demonstrate not only their superior economic, and therefore social, status, but also a close association with spiritual provision for their villagers and parishioners. From this they derived indirect sanctification for their jurisdiction.

The *eigenkirche* concept is well known in medieval history. It can be safely said that the development of the church's ministry through the parochial system depended largely on local lords building and patronizing local churches. Only a lord could afford to found a church. Kings and counts demonstrated their status through cathedrals and monasteries; local lords built parish churches. This is conspicuous consumption based on monopoly control of conventional economic resources.

In Anglo-Saxon England possession of a church was a prerequisite for the acquisition of lordly status. Not only were churches a status symbol, they were also a source of income. In return for the initial capital outlay involved in building a church, the lord achieved enhanced status since everybody in the village had to use the building which he had provided for the benefit of their souls. The lord also received income accruing to the church and from it. This income took the form of lump-sum incumbency payments, or rent, and customary dues. If a mill was a major source of economic revenue and a minor source of social status, a parish church was almost the reverse. The community not only contributed to the running costs of the lord's investment, they

also paid the lord for the privilege of using it. Patronage of parish churches was an element of resource exploitation denied to other members of the community.

There is abundant evidence to support this hypothesis. 11th century documents from Normandy reveal a frequent association between churches and mills when manorial assets are documented. There is also evidence linking the grants of churches and judicial profits. Prevailing economic attitudes to churches as economic assets are contained in Aelfric's *Lives of Saints* (i, 431) 'likewise some men sell even a church for hire, as if it were worthless mills...'. Although Aelfric is attacking the abuse of lordship in this passage, the mortgaging and selling of churches is more than adequately attested elsewhere. It should be noted that Aelfric's comment was obviously a response to a widespread secular practice.

An 11th century inscription over a church door records that a certain Orm bought a ruinous church and rebuilt it. Possibly an act of piety, such behaviour is also consistent with a 10th and 11th century market founded upon social ambition and economic avarice. St Mary's, Huntingdon (England), was granted in the 11th century by Edward the Confessor to two clerks. They in turn sold it to a royal chamberlain who sold it again to local priests.

The rôle of the parish church in connection with local economic affairs is further attested by the large number of markets which took place within churchyards or at church gates. Market fees more often than not went to the lord's purse. Because churches were not only a source of, and catalyst for, additional revenue, but were also an outlet for surplus revenue, they can be seen as physical expressions of wealth and status. Physical evidence, both excavated and standing, is therefore important in demonstrating the association between lords and churches. Results of a survey by Rodwell (published in Morris 1983) show one such facet of this association. Out of 29 churches with surviving Anglo-Saxon building fabric in the archdeaconry of Colchester, 19 are found associated with a medieval hall. In the Grand Caux peninsula of Normandy, Le Maho (1976) conducted a survey into 11th and 12th century earthwork enclosures. Nearly 50 per cent of his sample sites are within 500 m of a church of equivalent date. On some sites the church is contained within the ramparts.

The argument is then, simply, that churches embody both the features discussed already in connection with defensible sites and mills, namely that they are a demonstration of a lord's authority through conspicuous consumption and also a source of wealth in their own right. As with castles and mills, churches are a further example of lordly exploitation of resources (in this case both secular and spiritual) in order to enhance their own effective social control. They are often to be found within, or close by, other lordship features such as defensible sites, thus forming a physical expression of the perceived social infrastructure through topography.

Clearly there exists a need for further research into the relationship between the organization of the medieval economy and the structure of feudal society. Readily recognizable lordship sites such as castles must be viewed in the context of other lordship sites. The inter-relationship between lordship authority, coercive force, and economic domination has yet to be fully understood. Archaeology can contribute crucial economic evidence relating to lordship not available in documentary sources, even the Domesday Book. The way in which society was geared to support 'feudal'

lordship through economic means can be investigated through physical relationships in village topography. Assets such as mills were a means of extracting surplus to support lordship. Further evidence confirming the domination and control of such resources by lords would illustrate the passive rôle forced on the peasantry, ensuring their use of such assets and ultimately their funding of the lords who ruled them. This is as important to the study of feudal society as research into the legal and military aspects of feudalism.

In early medieval feudal Europe we find localized response to the absence of a strong, centralized state. At best a strong king could rein in his feudal underlings; at worst he became a puppet on a decentralized stage upon which were played games of local politics. The lack of a strong central government with effective control over the economy enabled, and necessitated, the initiative of local lords in assuming control over local resources in order to establish and enhance authority over the local population. Varying degrees of control over resources led inevitably to a class social order based on economic power. The extent to which this patchwork of local autonomies (with continent-wide variations) could be united under a single sovereign in any given region depended entirely upon the strength and weaknesses of individual personalities. Control over economic resources is a vital factor in the study of the emergence of the state in early medieval Europe. It could be argued that, with reference to the control of such resources at that time, we see not the emergence of a centralized capitalist state evolving naturally from feudalism and feudal modes of production, but a reaction to the collapse of a strong state civilization and economy, and the failure of a sociopolitical organization on a similar scale to fill the void. In studying early medieval Europe there exists an opportunity to study how economic and resource control was used to establish a social framework in the phase between the collapse of the slave economy and the emergence of the industrial economy.

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# *Copper production and eastern Mediterranean trade: the rise of complex society on Cyprus*

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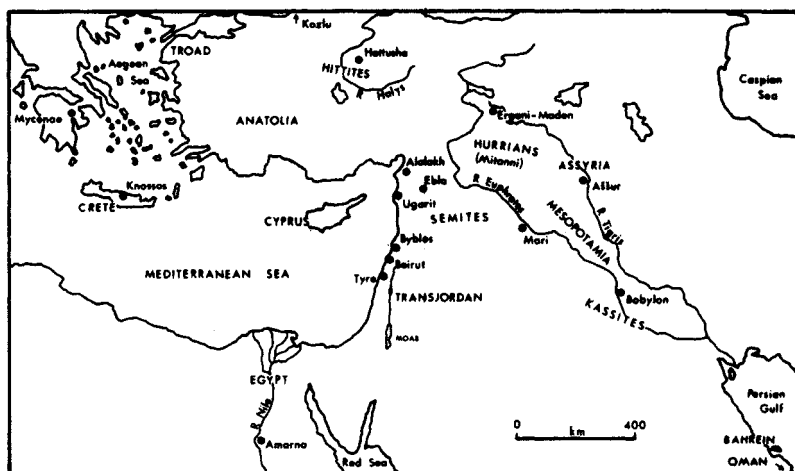
## **Introduction**

The archaeological record of the east Mediterranean island of Cyprus for the centuries 1700–1400 BC reveals a number of dramatic changes, dramatic at least with respect to the relatively gradual mode and tempo of change that prevailed over the previous two and a half millennia. Throughout the Early and much of the Middle Cypriote (EC, MC) periods, about 2300/2200–1700 BC, metallurgical technology lagged, foreign contact remained static, and Cyprus lingered in the background as more dynamic economic and cultural developments took place in the surrounding eastern Mediterranean, Aegean, and Near Eastern regions. Despite clear indications of cultural regionalism within Cyprus at this time, archaeological data overall bespeak peaceful relations amongst agricultural villages, and an island-wide uniformity in material developments.

During the transitional era known to Aegean and east Mediterranean prehistorians as the MCIII-LCI period (about 1700–1400 BC), urban centres with public and ceremonial architecture begin to develop throughout the island; differential burial practices become evident; writing appears for the first time; metallurgical production and export intensifies; *extensive* trade relations with the surrounding cultures of the eastern Mediterranean become apparent; fortifications, ‘mass’ burials, and increased finds of weaponry suggest a break with the relatively peaceful patterns of the past. Documentary evidence from Egypt, the Levant, and the Aegean sheds further light on these changes.

Such innovations represent the transformation of an isolated, village-based culture into an international, urban-oriented, complex society. Utilizing concepts from development economics and political anthropology, a materialist perspective on ideology, as well as models developed by archaeologists working on similar problems elsewhere, this study attempts to explain processes of change and innovation apparent in the Cypriote archaeological record of 1700–1400 BC.

In order to consider the impact of Cypriote copper production and demand from the eastern Mediterranean interregional exchange system on the development of social complexity within Bronze-Age Cyprus, discussion of relevant archaeological and metallurgical data is presented within a politicoeconomic theoretical framework. The textual evidence, which necessitates acceptance of the *Alashiya*-Cyprus equation



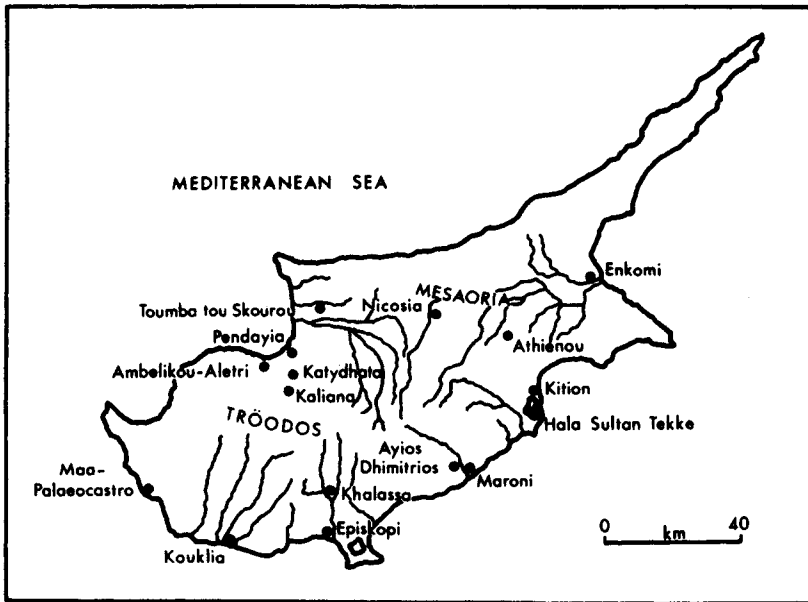
**Figure 10.1** Bronze-Age sites of the Aegean, East Mediterranean, and Ancient Western Asia.

(Holmes 1971, Knapp 1985a, pp. 234–41, Muhly 1982, 1972), has been presented in fuller detail elsewhere (Knapp 1986b, 1985a, 1979, pp. 151–286), and may be highlighted as follows.

The flourishing Middle to Late Bronze-Age kingdom of *Alashiya* is mentioned in a variety of languages, scripts, and media throughout ancient western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean: cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphic, and hieratic, Hebrew, Phoenician, and Linear B (Mycenaean Greek). *Alashiya* belonged to the eastern Mediterranean socio-linguistic sphere with its polylingual, polyethnic mix of Hurrians, Semites, Hittites, and Egyptians, much like the contemporary Syrian sites of Ugarit and Alalakh (Astour 1964, Knapp 1982) (see [Fig. 10.1](#)). Suffice it here to emphasize the following economic and political issues that characterize *Alashiya* in the documentary material and are germane to the ensuing discussion:

- (a) extensive copper resources and exports;
- (b) participation in eastern Mediterranean regional trade systems;
- (c) the ability to remain neutral in the ‘superpower’ (Egypt and the Hittites) struggle for political control over Syria in the 14th–13th centuries BC;
- (d) the capacity to accommodate political exiles banished from Anatolia and Syria;
- (e) importance as a strategically placed and economically flourishing ‘naval station’.

A number of prosperous and densely settled Late Bronze-Age urban centres on Cyprus reflect archaeologically the prominent geopolitical status indicated in the textual data ([Fig. 10.2](#)). From where did this economic fortune come, and what



**Figure 10.2** Late Bronze-Age urban centres, mining areas, and burial sites on the East Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

array of factors precipitated events that led, in an archaeological ‘moment of change’, to the rise of social complexity on Bronze-Age Cyprus? These questions are considered in the present study by analysing qualitatively certain economic aspects, socio-ideological issues, and politico-historical factors apparent in the archaeological and documentary record of Middle and Late Bronze-Age Cyprus.

The quantity of archaeological data discussed is immense as well as diverse. And since space is strictly limited, complete descriptions of the data and expanded discussions of the arguments offered in this study are presented elsewhere (Knapp 1985a, 1986a, 1986b, 1979).

### Archaeological background

Although intra-island regionalism, documented mainly by ceramics, seems to have been a recurrent trend in Cypriote prehistory (Herscher 1980, Peltenberg 1982, Swiny 1979), other archaeological indicators suggest broadly similar economic and cultural development under seemingly peaceful conditions during the EC and MC periods (Herscher 1978, p. 802). Differences in ceramic style do not preclude the likelihood that interaction occurred amongst the pre1700 BC regionally based cultural groups (Frankel 1974, Merrillees 1979). One salutary ‘event’ that occurred in this era is revealed by recent re-analyses of material from the MCI site of Ambelikou Aletti (alternatively called *Choma tis Galinis*): mining and

production of copper had begun on Cyprus already during the 19th century BC (Merrillees 1984, Zwicker 1982).

The MCIII-LCI period witnessed several notable changes in the archaeological record. Fortifications were built throughout the northern and central parts of the island (Åström 1972a, pp. 50–51, Catling 1973, pp. 166–70, Fortin 1982, 1983); ‘mass’ burials are attested in at least three sites (Åström 1972a, p. 50, Karageorghis 1965, pp. 17–18, 54–6); and numerous weapons have been found in MC burials (at Katydhata, Kaliana, and Pendayia: Catling 1964, pp. 110–11, 128, 1962, p. 164, no. 97, Karageorghis 1965, pp. 54–6). Differential burial practices begin by the MCII period and continue throughout the Late Bronze era: the abundance of (MCIII-LCI) material in Tomb 8 and the exotic materials—gold, ivory, faience, glass, and metal—of (MCII-LCI) Tomb 6 at Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* (Kromholz 1982, pp. 306–14); the built tombs of Enkomi (LCIA—Gjerstad *et al.* 1935, pp. 569–73; LCII—Johnstone 1971); the rich tombs and burials at Toumba tou Skourou (LCI—Vermeule 1974, pp. 8–9), Ayios Dhimitrios (LCIIA—South 1984b, South & Todd 1985), and Hala Sultan Tekke (LCIIIA—Åström *et al.* 1983, pp. 8–16). 1983, pp. 8–16).

Differentiated architectural complexes do not appear in the archaeological record of Cyprus until LCII-IIIa (about 1400–1200 BC): major (secular) ‘Ashlar’ Buildings’ have been uncovered at Enkomi, Ayios Dhimitrios, Maa *Palaeokastro*, and Maroni (Schaeffer 1952, pp. 239–48, Dikaïos 1969–71, pp. 171–90, pls. 272–5, South 1984a, pp. 18–25, Karageorghis *et al.* 1982, pp. 95–8, Fig. 2, Cadogan 1984); ‘sacred architecture’ has been revealed at Enkomi, Kition, and Palaeopaphos (Courtois 1971, Karageorghis 1976, pp. 55–7, 62–9, 1973, pp. 262–9, Maier 1979, Maier & von Wartburg 1985). Yet it seems almost certain that these unique public or ceremonial structures had still unidentified precursors in the MCIII-LCI period (Swiny 1981, p. 82).

A number of new sites appear and the size of sites increases. ‘Cypro-Minoan’ writing commences, develops, and spreads throughout much of the island (Masson 1978, Knapp & Marchant 1982). Extensive finds of copper slag, furnace fragments, crucibles, tuyères, and other copper-working accessories point to intensified production of copper (Åström 1972b, 1972c, Knapp 1986b, Muhly *et al.* 1980, Stech 1982). By the MCIII period (about 1700–1600 BC), Cyprus had established a widespread, reciprocal trade in ceramics with the Levant and Egypt (Åström 1972c, pp. 277–9); during the transitional MCIII-LCI period, an intensive exchange with the Aegean world began to develop (Portugali & Knapp 1985).

Viewing such changes within an economic framework, it may be observed that traditional economies such as that of earlier Bronze-Age Cyprus often react to a new or expanded market system by shifting the organization or increasing the magnitude of production factors (Bates & Lees 1977, Fisk & Shand 1969, Runnels 1981, pp. 183–4). With respect to Cypriote developments, *innovations* appear in the form of island-wide fortifications, the rise of coastal emporia, differentiated architectural and burial practices, the formation of an indigenous writing system, and participation in interregional trade. The *expansion of capital factors* may be seen in the development of an effective intra-island transportation system; in the obvious increase in copper production and the presumed, concomitant advances in extractive and metallurgical

technology; in the construction or purchase of boats (longships?) that can be related to the export of copper from the island; and generally in the concentration of newly founded sites and the overall increase in site size on the island. Contemporary written evidence and archaeological data alike suggest that copper production *intensified* and *expanded* in response to demand from external markets. Additional evidence for the intensification of production may be seen in the copper-refining installations that seem—on the basis of current data—to have matured initially at Enkomi and developed gradually at other sites (Ayios Dhimitrios, Athienou, Kition, Hala Sultan Tekke, possibly Toumba tou Skourou, and Khalassa *Pano Mantilaris*) during the course of the Late Bronze Age. Increased demand for Cypriote copper within the Aegean and east Mediterranean, and the related needs to formalize and legitimize copper production, and to integrate the internal and external organization of copper trade, are here regarded as key factors in the rise of urban centres and the related demographic and cultural developments on the island.

### **Economic aspects: production, transportation, and exchange**

Prior to about 1700 BC, the sociopolitical units of Cyprus appear to have been simple, unstratified, agricultural villages, isolated, for the most part, from the surrounding regions (for the few indicators of earlier contacts, see most recently Catling & MacGillivray 1983). With the rise of urban polities on the island during the 16th-15th centuries BC, however, ceramic, metal, and glyptic data clearly demonstrate intensifying contacts with the Aegean, the Levant, and Egypt (Åström 1967, p. 150, Åström 1972b, pp. 259–64, 1973, Artzy *et al.* 1975, 1981, Holmes 1975, Portugali & Knapp 1985). These items need not represent direct exchange between the areas involved—Late Bronze Age trade in the eastern Mediterranean is a complex and still poorly understood phenomenon (Knapp 1985b). Local or regional exchange is correlated with specialized forms of production in a highly complex manner (Earle 1982, 1985). A high volume of traded goods, for example, may perpetuate *local* as opposed to centralized control over specialized systems of production (Ammerman & Andrefsky 1982, Irwin 1978a). *Local* domination over copper production on Cyprus may well have characterized the initial stages of the island's emergent polity (Stech 1985; see further discussion below).

Internal changes in the mode and intensity of production often stem from the demand of external trade systems. High status or élite members of a society, in order to increase productive output for export and at the same time to enhance sociopolitical status may sponsor greater capital or labour investments (Runnels 1985). Individual élites who *controlled* production or the specialists who *implemented* it would have responded to new opportunities by making an economic choice often visible archaeologically in material objects produced or exchanged. The presence of politico-economic élites during the Cypriote Middle and Late Bronze Ages is demonstrated by converging streams of evidence (Knapp 1986a, pp. 70–84).

The Amarna letters from *Alashiya* indicate that, at least by the 14th century BC, Cyprus was a powerful and prosperous kingdom whose ruler—as may be concluded

from the use of the salutation 'my brother'—regarded himself to be on a par with the Egyptian pharaoh (Knudtzon 1910–1915, pp. 278–99). Like the dynasts of major Near Eastern polities of the time, the Cypriote king used state agents (*tamkar*) to conduct the bulk of foreign trade.

Cyprus's ability to maintain its neutrality in an international power struggle (between Egyptians and Hittites) and to accommodate international political exiles (from Syria and Anatolia) likewise necessitated an efficient administration coordinated by a political élite. By analogy with other Near Eastern polities, the employment of scribes to write the indigenous Cypro-Minoan script, or to prepare the cuneiform letters sent from *Alashiya* to the Egyptian Pharaoh at Amarna, argues for an administrative élite.

Social stratification also seems apparent from such diverse evidence as a presumed site hierarchy (coastal emporia, industrial sites, agricultural villages), large-scale public or ceremonial buildings, 'warrior' and/or regal burials, and prestige goods such as the (almost certainly) locally produced copper ingots (Muhly 1977, Muhly *et al.* 1980), a 'hoard' of gold objects and a lavish display of solid gold items in a burial (Åström *et al.* 1983, pp. 8–16, South 1984b), and countless imported items from the Aegean, the Levant, and Egypt. Finally, the archaeological indicators of innovation, intensification, and expansion presume the organizational expertise of a political élite geared to respond to the demand for copper—Cyprus's key basic resource. (References for all these data may be found in convenient tabular format in Knapp 1986a, pp. 75–6, Table 3, Knapp 1986b, p. 40, Table 1.)

Late Bronze-Age coastal cities such as Enkomi, Kition, and Hala Sultan Tekke, and inland sites such as Athienou *Bamboulari tis Koukounninas* and Khalassa *Pano Mantilares* demonstrate archaeologically evidence of copper production. Varying amounts of slag litter these sites, and metal-working installations have also been uncovered. If refining of *metallic* copper occurred chiefly in the major coastal cities, a centralized administration may have coordinated production for the export market (Stech 1982, pp. 112–13). The finished products—copper ingots found widely scattered in Bronze-Age Mediterranean sites—are rarely found on Cyprus itself (Muhly 1977). Yet their roughly standardized weight, shape, and purity again suggest a regulating authority as well as production for export.

The intensification of Cypriote copper production may reasonably be interpreted as one response to demand from a highly developed interregional exchange system operative in the east Mediterranean and the Near East (on the Near East, see Kohl 1982, 1979, on the eastern Mediterranean, see various papers in Knapp & Stech 1985). External demand may serve as an impetus for producers to elaborate and expand internal markets in order to ensure a dependable flow of goods or a consistent quality in manufacture. Essential raw materials in circulation, such as copper or tin ingots, often acquire a significant prestige value in addition to their obvious utilitarian merit within a society: miniature ('votice') ingots unearthed in Cyprus, bronze figurines such as the 'Ingot God' from Enkomi, and numerous other items were certainly endowed with such prestigious, symbolic significance (Catling 1964, pp. 268–9, Knapp 1986a; and see the extended discussion below).

Basic resources may thus generate continuous demand and eventually determine the extent and nature of the exchange. Prestige goods that can be accumulated and exchanged promote continuity in production of essential raw materials that might otherwise remain unexploited. Such non-utilitarian items are thus significant factors in mobilizing and maintaining demand (Sherratt 1977, p. 559). Political power and social advantage may accrue to those individuals who are able to limit access to foreign goods or prestigious resources in high demand from external markets. Like economic choice, social differentiation and political change may be visible archaeologically.

The production, transport, and exchange of basic raw materials or status items stimulates complexity within a social system and may also lead to the establishment of key trade routes or specialized trading centres (Hirth 1978, Hodges 1982, Irwin 1978a, Rathje 1971). Such 'gateway communities' tend to develop and flourish at strategic nodes where the production or flow of raw materials and goods can be controlled, or where local exchange systems articulate with interregional systems. The exchange network of the eastern Mediterranean linked into other networks that made up a much broader system, extending perhaps from the Indus Valley in the east to Britain in the west, and from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Sahara Desert in the south. Numerous interconnected local and regional subsystems served to move raw materials and goods in demand through networks encompassing much of the 'old world' during the second millennium BC (Klengel 1979, 1984; Potts 1982, Tosi 1982; amongst others, see the various papers in Knapp & Stech 1985).

The eastern Mediterranean 'free ports' of trade—Ugarit, Byblos, Beirut, Tyre, etc.—functioned as organs of a small, independent state. Inland powers such as Mitanni, the Hittites, or Assyria depended on such emporia for imports from afar. The right to trade necessarily had to be extended to merchants of all lands, even those with strained or openly hostile diplomatic relations—for example Egypt and Anatolia. The major polities upheld the neutrality of these harbour cities. During the 14th century BC, first the Egyptians then the Hittites bound Ugarit to themselves by treaty (Kitchen 1969, pp. 80–3, Liverani 1962, pp. 23–5, 48–9, 1979, pp. 1298–308, 1323–37); yet Ugarit—like the other Levantine ports—continued to enjoy a predominantly independent existence.

Documentary evidence reveals that Hittite, Egyptian, Aegean, and probably Cypriote merchants resided at Ugarit (Knapp 1983, pp. 42–3, 1985a, Liverani 1979, pp. 1329–33, Nougayrol 1955, pp. 107 (Crete), 142 (Egyptian merchants); 1956, pp. 103–5, Schaeffer 1939, pp. 53–67, 72, 1956, pp. 26–9, 1962, p. 199 (Hittite merchants)). Egyptian, Hittite, Aegean, and Cypriote goods were in plentiful supply at Ugarit and its port Minet el-Beidha (Courtois 1979, pp. 1283–4, Courtois & Courtois 1978, pp. 282–353, Schaeffer 1956, pp. 30–9, 41, 199, 235). Socio-economic as well as cultural relations between Ugarit and the Cypriote coastal emporia were close and many-faceted (Åström & Masson 1982, Arnaud 1982, p. 106, no. 48, Knapp 1983, E. Masson 1974, 1973 Masson). Cypriote ports such as Enkomi, Hala Sultan Tekke, and Toumba tou Skourou enjoyed an advantageous market potential which ensured the availability of all sorts of domestic (pottery, copper ingots) as well as imported (ivory, tin ingots, Aegean and Levantine pottery) products (Åström 1967, pp. 145–56, Holmes 1969, 1975, pp. 94–6; Maddin *et al.* 1977, pp. 45–7). Similarities in material culture



amongst these Cypriote entrepôts and their northern Levantine counterparts demonstrate close intercultural contact and imply similar economic functions within the eastern Mediterranean regional system of exchange.

The new port cities of Cyprus developed as specialized emporia with concentrations of population. While copper mining, production, and trade thrust Cyprus into the commercial and economic sphere of the eastern Mediterranean, the strategic location of the port cities fuelled that thrust. It seems reasonable to speculate that the cumulative effect of simultaneous control over copper resources and interregional trade—including access to exotic foreign goods—would have been increased centralization, wealth, and social stratification.

### **Ideology and social organization**

Yoffee has recently suggested that the evolution of social complexity is based on the cumulative accretion of economic, political, and social power (1985, p. 43). Symbolic aspects of *societal* power ‘...not only link peoples and settlements beyond factors of kinship, but confer honour and prestige on those who maintain these symbols’ (Yoffee 1985, p. 43). Changes in social organization necessitate the adoption of a new set of social conventions, and recognition and acceptance of the insignia, information, and power that characterize those conventions. To ensure that members of society adopt such norms, especially where the capacity for social organization may still have been limited, or where the ability to impose obedience by force was still underdeveloped, belief systems, rituals of sanctification, and sacred propositions would have played a critical rôle (Drennan 1976, pp. 345–7, Knapp 1986a, pp. 67–9, 1988, Rappaport 1972, pp. 28–30).

Whatever the previous level of economic production and political development, the changes apparent in the MCIII-LCI archaeological record indicate the appearance of new sociopolitical rôles, perhaps based on achieved rather than ascriptive relationships. Signs of social upheaval, militarism, regionalism, and local control over copper production and exchange clearly reveal internal social evolution, if not revolution. These data thus suggest the emergence of new social organization arranged along economic and political lines.

How did the Cypriote élite(s) organize control in what, by consensus, must have been an island culturally if not politically divided? How did they *legitimize* that control? To answer these questions, it is necessary to discuss briefly a set of ‘symbolic’ or ‘exotic’ ritual artefacts, together with some examples of monumental (public or ‘sacred’) architecture found in association with metallurgical activity. What is the relationship of such exotica as bronze statuettes, miniature ingots, ingot representations, and ‘sacred’ architecture, dated mainly to the 13th and 12th centuries BC, to politico-economic developments that led to the rise of social complexity on Cyprus during the 17th–15th centuries BC? (This material, and its chronological relationship to earlier eras, has been discussed comprehensively in Knapp 1986a.)

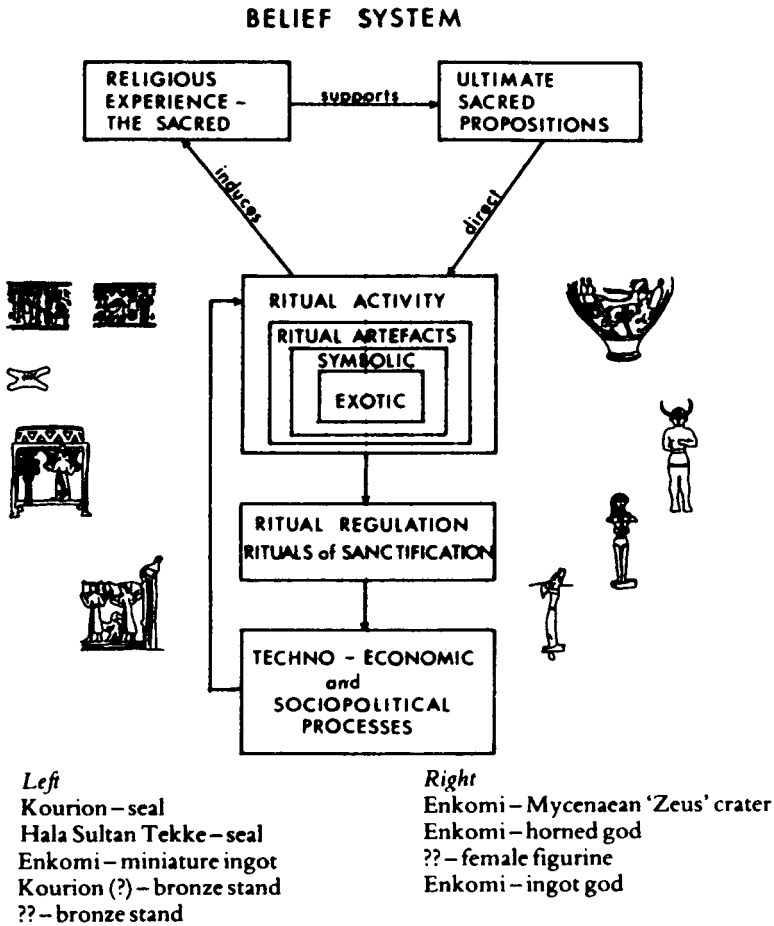
In order to establish and maintain unequal access to essential resources or prestige goods, power-seeking individuals or groups often find it necessary to acquire or adopt symbols that legitimize their position, and enable them to coopt goods and labour,

ostensibly on the community's behalf, for their own political and economic goals. In his study of the rôle of symbols, sanctification, and religious experience in Formative Mesoamerica, Drennan modelled Rappaport's 'operation' of religion in a circular relationship: ritual (or ritual activities) induces religious experience, which supports 'ultimate sacred propositions', which in turn direct the ritual activity (Drennan 1976, p. 347, Rappaport 1971, pp. 28–32). Ritual activities serve as the interface between religion and techno-economic or sociopolitical activities (Fig. 10.3, intended to model the Cypriote situation, is based on Drennan 1976, Fig. 11.8).

In the absence of *effective* means of coercion or control (that is, political power), religious sanctions provide a way to organize and develop economic strategies, and to establish the political configurations that direct these strategies. Whether we invoke Weberian notions on the pervasiveness of religious ethics in social institutions (Weber 1956, p. 209), Durkheimian concepts of the impact of religion and religious symbolism on the development of solidarity amongst a society's members (Durkheim 1915), or structural Marxist convictions that religion is part of the 'internal armature' (that is, the economic base) of society (Godelier 1978, p. 10), common consensus reigns on the rôle of the sacred in the regulation of society, and on the effectiveness of sanctifying individuals, institutions, and values in implementing the economic exploitation and production of basic resources.

The belief system suggested by the archaeological record of Late Bronze Age Cyprus would seem to have placed strong emphasis on legitimizing the social status—and concomitantly the political power—of a non-ascriptive group closely linked to the overall production, transportation, and distribution of copper. The insignia adopted by this (élite) group consisted of, most importantly, the bronze statuettes and the miniature ingots. The statuettes embody, in anthropomorphic reality, a divinity representing the economic basis of Bronze-Age Cypriote society. The miniature ingots materially depict that base: the copper oxhide ingot, an *insigne* of status that may have been representative of élites. Depictions of ingot-bearers on bronze stands, ceramics, and seals may represent the iconography propagated by a managerial élite to stimulate production. The scene of an ingot-bearer before a tree may have served to symbolize the tree as the social power that provided the sanctions and means to develop and fulfil politico-economic goals.

Proximity between metallurgical workshop and ceremonial structure may symbolize directly the sanctification of copper production, and at the same time represent the association between the managers of production and the primary producers. While the available archaeological data make it difficult if not impossible to establish the disposition of the functionaries who controlled production in the workshops so closely associated with ceremonial structures at Kition, Enkomi, Athineou, and elsewhere, it is suggested that a single politico-economic institution, directly endowed with ritual sanctification to ensure that its dictates would be met, controlled both 'temple' and workshop. Such a conspicuous juxtaposition of metallurgical production and ritual activity over a widespread area, and the economic and sociocultural interaction they represent, seem more indicative of supra-local organization than of autonomous local polities.



**Figure 10.3** Belief System of Bronze-Age Cyprus (model based on Drennan 1976, Fig. 11.8)

Ritual artefacts may also reflect the division of society into managers and producers. If the small ‘votive’ vessels (from Enkomi and Athienou) and seals are presumed to be representative of the productive classes in society, the exotica from the ‘sanctuaries’—fine (often imported) ceramics, bucrania, bronze and gold artefacts—may typify the insignia of the élite.

Although we can neither identify the deities nor name the regulators of the Cypriote copper industry, at least we might begin to appreciate the rôle of the ‘religious’, and the use of religious sanctions, in establishing social position, centralizing political authority, and validating the politico-economic basis of that authority (Chang 1983, Cherry 1986, Keatinge 1981, Keightly 1983, Wheatley 1971, pp. 315–16). On Late Bronze-Age Cyprus, religious ideology—devised and developed by élites who sought

control over the copper industry—fostered economic developments and sanctioned sociopolitical goals. As power created religion, religion stabilized power.

Profits from copper production and interregional exchange would have been reinvested into commercial enterprise and into the stabilization and legitimization of the centralizing authority. The centralization of production may be regarded as an élite strategy to maintain the co-operation of the rural sector (mining and agricultural villages) and to increase their dependence on specialized services and goods provided by the ruling élite (Tosi 1984, p. 42). The archaeological association of public or ceremonial structures with the means of production, and with the symbolic insignia of status, wealth, and power suggests that the organizational requirements of the new authority had been met and that its position and power within society had been sanctified.

### **Copper, cosmopolitanism, and political power**

The initial impetus to increased copper production may thus have been endogenous, motivated by the desire of aspiring élites to attract and enter profitable foreign markets. Sociopolitical, economic, or environmental events in southwest Asia about 1600 BC may have helped to create demand for new copper sources in the Levant, in markets served by long-established emporia such as Ugarit and Byblos, in new centres established by the recently formed polity of Mitanni, or in areas reorganized by the resurgent Hittite state. Copper and tin supplies entering Syria and Levant via Mesopotamian may well have been disrupted by ethnic movements (Hurrians, Kassites), military expeditions (Hittites), or environmental decline.

The modern-day Gulf state of Oman, part of ancient *Magan*, had provided an abundance of copper to Ur and other Mesopotamian centres early in the second millennium BC (Franklin *et al.* 1976). The collapse of this trade, which had been channelled through the entrepôt at *Dilumn* (Bahrein) (Potts 1978, pp. 40–2), disrupted the supply of Omani copper to Mesopotamia (and thence to the Levant) just when (18th century BC) cuneiform records demonstrate that Cyprus (*Alashiya*) began supplying copper to Mari and Babylon (Dossin 1939, p. 111, 1965, Millard 1973). If local political factors at the end of the 17th century BC disrupted the Euphrates-borne tin trade (Muhly 1973, pp. 290–302), it is reasonable to assume that the Syrians would have sought new sources and new markets to maintain their rôle in interregional trade (Stech 1985). And even if—*contra* any archaeological evidence—the mines at Ergani Maden in eastern Anatolia had been supplying some of the copper involved in the Old Assyrian tin trade, the disruption of that trade late in the 19th century BC set in motion new spheres of exchange and avenues of interaction which ultimately brought tin from the east (Afghanistan) and copper from the west (Cyprus) into Syrian centres such as Mari, Alalakh, and Ugarit.

Egyptian records as well as the cuneiform Amarna letters demonstrate that demand for Cypriot copper continued throughout the 15th–14th centuries BC (Knudtzon 1910–15, pp. 278–99, Lalouette 1979, pp. 341–2, Mueller 1910, pp. 91–2). Spatially and temporally diverse documentary sources therefore indicate growth in demand for

Cypriote copper and offer one explanation for the intensification of Cypriote copper output noted in the contemporary archaeological record. While an Ugaritic document provides textual evidence for one possible mode of transport utilized to satisfy demand (Knapp 1983), increasing amounts of Cypriote ceramics in Syria and the southern Levant after 1600 BC provide archaeological counterpoint to the textual theme (Artzy 1985, Gittlen 1981, Hankey 1979, Merrillees 1968).

The realization of the political potential inherent in foreign demand for copper may have prompted pre-existing, local administrative bodies to reorganize and assert control over the mining, production, and transport of copper, over processing into ingots or other desired forms, and over commercial distribution. Copper production and export—organized through the densely populated, newly established coastal emporia—thus ensured Cyprus's entry into the lucrative eastern Mediterranean interregional exchange system.

The political economy of the island matured as low-level élites gained control over surplus wealth. Increased foreign demand for Cypriote copper promoted these élites to formalize internal copper production, thereby transforming a village-based culture into an international, urban-oriented society. The individual household production of local economies expanded into a basic resource (perhaps also craft and food) industry designed for a market exchange system. Local subsistence economies, in other words, became integral to regional political economies, a development well illustrated in the contemporary archaeological record. Once the copper trade was organized to expand production in response to the demand from an interregional exchange system, positive feedback stimulated the continued growth of complex, stratified society on Cyprus.

The archaeological and textual record of post 1400 BC Cyprus allows some evaluation of the outcome of these attempts at organization and legitimization. Evidence of regionalism diminishes noticeably. Mass-produced Cypriote pottery made its way to the Levant (Artzy 1985). Expanding trade relations with both the Aegean and the Levant after about 1400 BC, and the opportunity to participate in copper production and trade, or in the manufacture of products such as ceramics and textiles, may have limited regionalism and helped to unify separate cultural or political units. The Amarna letters sent from *Alashiya* imply that the paramount king of Cyprus wielded considerable authority over the copper industry.

The Amarna letters demonstrate that Cyprus had the capacity to dispatch a *minimum* total of 897 talents of copper (approximately 22 410 kg (53 820 lb) to Egypt over a period of 25 years (for the calculations see Knapp 1985a, pp. 237–38, no. 47). This represents a *mean* monthly shipment of 82 kg (180 lb; the equivalent of three ingots), and underscores the productive output, shipping capacity, and organizational and administrative efficiency of a highly specialized and unified system. The success of that system, and the effectiveness of the insignia that represented it, are demonstrated by Cyprus's increasing involvement in the social, economic, and political spheres of the eastern Mediterranean, Aegean, and Near Eastern realms.

## Conclusions

The basic ability to transport and exchange prestigious exotic goods, basic resources, or utilitarian items in demand is a necessary but insufficient condition to initiate processes leading to social change, state formation, or internationalization (Allen 1984, Portugali & Knapp 1985, Wright 1984, 1977). Explanations for the rise of social complexity must evaluate not only economic issues such as production, consumption, and exchange, but also social issues such as status and organization, political issues such as power and prestige, and demographic/ecological issues related to population, location, and resources.

This study has evaluated the impact of ideological factors on socioeconomic organization and political power, and the effect of certain historical events on the organization of society, the pace of copper production, and the establishment of political power in the middle of the second millennium BC on Cyprus. The demands of foreign trade, developed in the context of international events set in motion by western Asiatic states during the first half of the second millennium BC, probably conditioned at least partially the initial impetus to increased copper production. The realization of the power potential inherent in foreign demand may have prompted aspiring élites into organizing, regulating, and manipulating trade as a financial base for their activities.

The relationship between ideology and power—economic, social, or political power—is expressed not only in the manner in which élites or other special interest groups utilize religious ideology to establish, challenge, or change a specific social order, but also in the sense in which power establishes ‘religious’ personalities, authorizes specific religious practices and their insignia, defines what is to be believed, and in fact constructs religious ideology (Asad 1983, p. 18). Sanctity, in other words, serves important social, economic, and political functions; self-sustaining politico-economic groups often manipulate sanctity to elevate their own position(s). To sanctify social conventions, economic regulations, or political authority is to transform the arbitrary into the necessary, and to portray to the individual the needs and interests of society and his/her own needs. Ideology is here regarded as an element integral to the economy, and as another means to ensure the smooth formation and perpetuation of political power by a managerial élite.

The interplay of external demand and trade, accumulation and (re)investment of wealth, the division of labour into specialized production units, and the legitimization of political power associated with production, was central to the rise of social complexity on Bronze-Age Cyprus. The exchange network, in all its ramifications, would have provided the opportunity for investment, while the manipulation of trade became the basis for further structural changes in society. It seems clear that some individuals were able to organize and control key aspects of resource acquisition, production, transportation, and distribution, and so to establish and maintain social status and economic advantage in the midst of the organizational changes needed to stabilize their authority.

In applying the Cypriote data to a more general theory on the origins of social complexity, it must be emphasized that factors unique to each culture may promote or limit growth in that culture’s sociopolitical system. Social, ecological, and

technological constraints operative in one culture often condition change in that situation alone. It is suggested nonetheless that certain interrelated phenomena tend to occur as a society's political institutions and economic mechanisms become increasingly elaborate. Within the economic realm, we may expect to find material indicative of *specialized and intensified production activities*. Intensified or specialized production is often the predictable outcome of increased *external demand* and the attendant participation in *interregional systems of exchange*. Within the political sphere, the archaeological record of a society steadily gaining in complexity should include indicators of *competition for* and *control of basic resources* in a situation of increased production. Since élites often dominate these activities, we may also expect to see evidence of *social stratification* and *demographic centralization*. *Conspicuous insignia of rank*, manufactured in the service of a regulating authority, often symbolize sociopolitical control over the forces of production, and in turn help to stimulate accumulation of wealth.

Politico-economic forces on Middle and Late Bronze-Age Cyprus developed labour specialization in copper mining and extractive metallurgy, organized a profitable system of copper production, transportation, and exchange, and ideologically supported that system by establishing and promoting a series of exotic and symbolic artefacts unique to Bronze-Age Cypriote society. By viewing cultural change and historical developments in terms of internal social processes, while simultaneously weighing the force of external events inevitable in the broader system of the Bronze-Age Mediterranean world, this study has attempted to provide a balanced account of the enigmatic archaeological and documentary record of mid-second millennium BC Cyprus. The interpretation is presented not as historical 'fact', but as an open-ended, necessarily simplified, scenario that will certainly have to be modified and refined with cumulative archaeological and socio-historical analyses.

### Abbreviations

**Acts: MEM:** *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium: the Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean*, V.Karageorghis (ed.). Nicosia: Department of Antiquities.

**Early Metallurgy:** *Acta of the International Archaeological Symposium: early metallurgy in Cyprus, 4000–500 BC*. J.D.Muhly, R.Maddin & V.Karageorghis (eds). Nicosia: Pierides Foundation.

**Mesopotamien:** *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn. Politische und Kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4.-1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* 25. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 1, H.-J. Nissen & J.Renger (eds). Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.

**PPE:** *Prehistoric production and exchange: the Aegean and east Mediterranean*. UCLA Institute of Archaeology, Monograph 25. A.B.Knapp & T.Stech (eds). Los Angeles: UCLA Institute of Archaeology.

**RDAC:** *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*. Nicosia: Department of Antiquities.

**RS:** *Ras Shamra-prefix* for field registration nos. of French Archaeological Mission to Ugarit.

**SCE:** *Swedish Cyprus expedition*. Stockholm, Lund.

**SIMA:** *Studies in Mediterranean archaeology*. Göteborg, Sweden: P.Åström's Förlag.

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THE RÔLE OF WRITING AND  
LITERACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL POWER



*Introduction: literacy and social complexity*

MOGENS TROLLE LARSEN

The relevance of a group of chapters devoted specifically to the question of literacy and the function of writing in early societies in this book hardly needs to be explained, and yet, traditionally it is assumed that the introduction of written texts marks a clear-cut break between such disciplines as archaeology and history, just as it defines the transition from prehistory to history. This terminology is somewhat unclear, however, and should be examined with care: firstly, when observing individual societies it becomes obvious that writing has its roots in sociopolitical developments which belong to the 'prehistoric' phases (see Nissen 1985, p. 360); and secondly, we can see that writing was used for such diverse purposes in different societies that it is impossible to establish hard and fast definitions of such concepts as 'history' versus 'prehistory' on the basis of the presence or absence of writing.

The common practice therefore has consequences for our conception of central features in the range of problems taken up in this book. We are not simply dealing with a question which relates to periodization and definition of terms, for writing is connected with basic features in the transformation of societies from 'simple' to 'complex', the rise of the state, or the development of cities.

The introduction of writing has in fact often been seen as one of the decisive factors in the process of state formation and urbanization, but agreement seems only to exist in very broad terms. In his classic study of the pre-industrial city Gideon Sjoberg claimed that literacy was 'the single firm criterion for distinguishing the city, the nucleus of civilization, from other types of early settlements' (Sjoberg 1960, p. 33), and Gordon Childe's famous list of the ten criteria of urbanism naturally includes the use of writing along with, for example, population concentration, craft specialization, monumental architecture, social stratification and long-distance foreign trade (Childe 1957). I.J. Gelb, in his authoritative *A study of writing* claimed that writing can only exist in a civilization, and a civilization cannot exist without writing (1963:p. 222).

However, there have been dissenting voices who have pointed out that this kind of classificatory precision is difficult to relate to observable phenomena in the real world. Wheatley's extensive study of the origin and nature of the ancient Chinese city contains a critique of the use of literacy as a defining criterion for urbanism, since it



would force us to exclude from that category both the large but compact Central Andean settlements of Inca times, foci of the only true empire in preColumbian America (as well as the earlier Peruvian ceremonial complexes), and the dense aggregations of people in the Yoruba territories (Wheatley 1971, p. 377).

Concentrating on the problem of historical process rather than definition and classification, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has suggested, on the other hand, that there is a clear correlation between the introduction of a system of writing and the development of complex societies, cities, and empires, all of which were constructed on inequality, stratification, and subjugation. He posits an indisputable connection between the invention of writing and social or intellectual developments in such a context, and the traditional high cultures of, for example, Egypt and China stand out for him as clear examples of such developments, whereas on the other hand the African states which had no system of writing characteristically have been unable to reproduce themselves over long periods of time. So, the claim is that writing appears to be necessary for a centralized, stratified state to reproduce itself (Lévi-Strauss 1955, pp. 265–6).

This debate is obviously relevant for the proper conceptualization of early societies, and I shall return to it. However, there is a further complication stemming from the actual practice in the fields which are concerned with the development of complex societies that made use of writing. Impenetrable barriers have been erected between distinct fields of study called ‘philology’ and ‘archaeology’, each with its own institutions, traditions, journals, and conferences. In my own field of ancient Near Eastern studies, where documents are uncovered in the ground during excavations rather than in libraries and archives, such attitudes become particularly important and have far-reaching consequences. Texts have been regarded as a kind of autonomous evidence which could, indeed should, be dealt with separate from pots, houses—even art. As a result it is quite common to be in a position where texts have no precise archaeological context, since it was often regarded as unimportant to record in which house or room a group of documents were found, or the relationship of texts to other objects found in the same locality.

Obviously, such poor excavation techniques are not responsible for the continuation of this problematic state of affairs today; it is rather the lack of a clear understanding of the fact that texts are archaeological objects like potsherds and bones, and that it is only a combined analysis of the entire mass of evidence from an excavation that has any chance of reaching satisfactory analytical results.

Once inscribed material is given over to the epigrapher, the archaeologist seldom refers to it again other than to date a particular level, or identify his site. Rarely are tablets studied by the archaeologist as the most valuable artefact in relation to other artefacts. Likewise, the epigrapher loses the valuable information on context in the interpretation of his texts (Gibson 1972, p. 113).

The scholarly practices and traditions built up in these different fields have compounded the problems. Where archaeologists tend to define their discipline in terms of 'method', ancient historians and philologists have pursued a sometimes quite strongly defended positivist attitude and concentrated their efforts on the texts as texts. One consequence of this unresolved conflict has been that most young and daring archaeologists have chosen to work in prehistoric areas and periods, and the great advances in archaeological field techniques as well as interpretative analysis have consequently been made there.

However, as the studies collected here indicate, there is a growing awareness of the importance of a unified approach. An exciting example of the possibilities that lie in a truly integrated combination of texts and other archaeological artefacts can be found in the work being carried out at the moment in the field of Mayan archaeology, where a whole new framework for our understanding of socio-historical developments is growing out of the evidence introduced by hieroglyphic writings. It is indeed time for some of the old barriers between the traditional disciplines to fall, for, in the words of John Baines: 'Archaeology and writing complement each other's silences' (Ch. 12).

### **Interpretations: literacy and complexity**

The question of the proper evaluation of the rôle played by the introduction of writing has been discussed widely over the last couple of decades, with Jack Goody as perhaps the most influential anthropological contributor. In 1963 he published an article with Ian Watt which was entitled 'The consequences of literacy', a programmatic statement which has undoubtedly had a significant impact on many people's thinking about this subject. This article started a long and involved debate which was partly orchestrated by Goody himself in a collection of papers which had the title 'Literacy in traditional societies'. However, Goody's and Watt's first contribution was important not only because it raised a number of essential questions, but perhaps also because it overstated the issues, since this created the need for responses from specialists in a number of different fields. Goody has since distanced himself from at least the title of the paper, calling it 'brash' (1986, p. 12), and instead wants to speak of the 'implications' of writing. He has written two books on the topic since, and it seems fair to say that his later work has moved consistently towards a more balanced and careful analysis than the one offered in the first paper. This is important to realise, for quite a number of critical studies have since then continued to attack Goody for positions which do not seem to be defended by him any more.

He has made it clear that he did not intend to identify literacy as a 'sufficient' cause for social or intellectual developments, and defended himself against his critics by pointing out that

choosing a topic to investigate means not only being seen as believing that human affairs are determined by a single factor. Some writers even appear to assume that what is meant by 'causal relations' are those determined in

just this way—that is, situations that have one cause, everywhere, all the time (1986, p. xv).

On the other hand, he maintains that literacy is one of the most important preconditions for a number of changes or developments which affect social, political, cultural, and cognitive structures. Obviously, the introduction of writing does not immediately or necessarily lead to such changes:

The written tradition is cumulative, it builds up over time. I have tried to outline the effects of such a tradition on the evolution of the organization of societies, especially in its transitional phases. But I see these effects as trends rather than as necessities (1986, p. 184).

These sentiments are echoed by another major participant in the literacy debate, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, who wrote an influential study of the printing press as an agent of change in Europe. It is important to note that she speaks of ‘an’ agent rather than ‘the’ agent, but on the other hand

one cannot treat printing as just one among many elements in a complex causal nexus, for the communications shift transformed the nature of the causal nexus itself. It is of special historical significance because it produced fundamental alterations in prevailing patterns of continuity and change (Eisenstein, p. 1983:p. 273).

Goody’s project was defined as ‘the analysis of writing on “modes of thought” (or cognitive processes) on the one hand, and on the major institutions of society on the other’ (1977, p. ix); the first part of this project seems to be concluded with the book *The domestication of the savage mind* from 1977, and I have discussed this book in the light of the Mesopotamian evidence elsewhere (Larsen 1987b). The treatment of the second part of Goody’s project is contained in his work *The logic of writing and the organization of society* which addresses four main problems as they relate to literacy: organized religion, economic activities, the political system of early states, and lastly the legal system. With respect to state formation Jack Goody suggests that ‘writing was not essential to the development of the state, but of a certain type of state, the bureaucratic one’ (Goody 1986, p. 92). Like Lévi-Strauss, Goody introduces the example of African states as a contrast to the developments described for the ancient Near East, and he refers to studies which show the difference between the ‘traditional case’ (non-literate of course) where we find an emphasis on patron-client relationships, and the colonial regime, ‘the impersonal, situational authority of the salaried office-holder’.

It seems to me that Goody’s analysis is incapable of moving beyond a set of very general statements, and that the more adventurous conclusions drawn by him concerning conditions in the ancient Near East in most cases are flawed by the fact that his analysis attempts to combine evidence from a 3000 year long literate tradition.

His insistence that writing played a vital rôle in the development of a bureaucratic type of state is hardly a controversial position, but rather a restatement of views expressed by, for instance, Lévi-Strauss.

The claim that writing was a prime mover in the development of complex societies or bureaucratic states appears to spring from a conviction that it was of fundamental importance for the promotion of 'the homogeneity of the ruling classes, as prime instrument in the consolidation of their power, and as the principal disseminator of their value systems' (Wheatley 1971, p. 377). Lévi-Strauss argued with great force that the primary function of written communication was to facilitate exploitation and subjugation (1955, p. 266).

The idea that writing was the technology of repression is not, in fact, a position which is peculiar to the anthropological and archaeological discussion of literacy. The postulated relationship between literacy and social complexity and development, which has of course played a large role in a number of extensive alphabetization campaigns in the Third World, has been hotly debated in several contributions to the study of literacy (see in general Street 1984). Lévi-Strauss himself pointed out that the great efforts to spread 'enlightenment' and literacy in Europe after 1800, including the building of schools, etc., may be seen in conjunction with such factors as the development of military service, a general proletarianization, and the need for literate workers in the new industries (1955, p. 266). At the time the debate in Europe dealt rather openly with these questions, as pointed out by Clanchy:

Opponents of government policy were worried that schools might succeed in educating people to a point where there would be a surplus of scholars and critics who might undermine the social hierarchy. Such fears were allayed by reformers emphasizing elementary practical literacy and numeracy (the three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic) rather than a liberal education in the classical tradition, which remained as much the preserve of an élite of *litterati* in 1900 as it had been in 1200 (Clanchy 1979, p. 263).

These attitudes indicate that the technology of writing clearly has a double function, being both (and, according to Lévi-Strauss, primarily) a means of repression *and* a powerful tool for the intellect which can be used to combat such repression. The Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch in his discussion of literacy supplements Lévi-Strauss's analysis:

The city, where writing appeared, manifests this grandeur, this new dimension which man grasps for himself. The freedom of the mind, or at least the possibility that this may eventually be achieved, reveals itself in the first eyes which knew how to decipher these terrifying signs. As if a gigantic wager had been struck, where the stakes this time were either the misery of history (the implacable will of gods and conquering masters), or the progressive liberation of the mind from all cultural bonds, the possibility

that man might become the conscience of the world, truly *homo sapiens* (de Heusch, p. 146).

It is understandable that modern Western man, who lives in a world which is dominated by the written word, tends to see illiteracy as an indisputable sign of backwardness and primitivity. Any newspaper report on a poor developing country will as a matter of course link illiteracy with hunger and underdevelopment, and alphabetization campaigns have been seen as the prerequisite for economic and technological progress. The monopoly on written communication which was retained by the colonial powers, and which had grotesque results in countries such as Zaire, had to be replaced by a condition of equal access to information. However, it has become exceedingly clear that widespread literacy is no cure for political inequality, and that democracy, freedom, development, progress, and all of these other potent dreams do not materialize as a result of alphabetization campaigns. Literacy does not create social development.

In this introduction I take as my point of departure the evidence from Mesopotamia where some of the potential of this invention was first realized in the small city-states on the alluvial plain in what is now southern Iraq. More than 5000 years ago the first written documents in man's history were composed here, and the evidence for the first couple of centuries of literate practices is sufficiently extensive to allow us to draw at least some tentative conclusions.

### **Mesopotamian writing**

#### *The Uruk phenomenon*

The first known human system of writing was invented in southern Mesopotamia around 3100 BC, and this script, developed and changed in both subtle and drastic ways, continued to be used in the ancient Near East until the beginning of the Christian era—known as the cuneiform system of writing (Gelb 1963, Hawkins 1979).

The earliest known texts come from the sacred precinct Eanna in the town Uruk, and they number about 4000. They have been found in secondary deposits and they belong to two phases known as Uruk IV and III, in all covering perhaps a century. Contemporary with the Uruk III texts is a group of documents from a place known as Jamdat Nasr, and from a slightly later date are texts found at the ruins of the town Ur (for a survey of the evidence from Mesopotamia see Nissen 1986b, pp. 316–22).

Uruk was at this time remarkably large and contained a series of monumental building complexes, presumably all of them temples. It seems to have dominated a rather large area at the southernmost end of the alluvium, even though it was not necessarily the major city in southern Mesopotamia at the time (Jasim & Oates 1986, p. 349).

According to Hans J. Nissen, who is in charge of the project that aims to publish and analyse the texts from Uruk, southern Mesopotamia was settled on a large scale only

a couple of centuries before the first texts were written. It seems that a change in climate led to a drying up of the waterlogged land near the head of the Persian Gulf, and this resulted in a major influx of people who took advantage of the extraordinarily fertile land. The very first steps towards complex sociopolitical systems, including a hierarchical settlement structure, were taken in the neighbouring Khuzistan plain. Small settlements had existed on the alluvial plain, but around 3300 it suddenly became very extensively settled. The phase between this date and the first texts is—as if so often case—a poorly documented formative period during which we may postulate ‘the formation of economic units of a size and complexity previously unknown’ (Nissen 1985, p. 350). When writing first appeared Uruk was undoubtedly one of the largest urban sites in the region, with a population that can conservatively be estimated as above 10 000 (see Adams & Nissen 1972).

The concentration of a large population, massive public buildings, and the existence of writing are elements which classically belong together in any analysis of early state formation or urbanization. There is another feature which is characteristic of the Uruk period: a very extensive territorial expansion of the Uruk phenomenon. In recent years we have seen the excavation of sites in Syria which are very heavily influenced from Uruk—in fact, some appear to represent veritable colonies, such as the very large, walled city at Habuba Kabira on the Euphrates. This settlement is, like sites such as, for instance, Jebel Aruda, to be seen as an intrusion into the local traditions; other sites in the same region, such as Tell Brak, show clear signs of heavy influence from the Uruk tradition, but they still retain their local characteristics—in contrast to the ‘colonies’ which show pure Uruk assemblages (Oates 1986, p. 252; Algaze 1986, pp. 285–90). Nissen has also pointed out that we have long known of other evidence, for instance from seals, which point to commercial contacts between Egypt, the Aegean, Anatolia, and central Iran (1976, p. 6). It has been suggested that the stimulus towards the development of an Egyptian system of writing came from such contacts with Uruk people, perhaps by way of the ‘colonies’ in Syria (Moorey 1987).

The basis for such settlements is somewhat obscure; the large, walled town at Habuba gives the impression of real colonization and the implantation of significant numbers of people, but trade and the procurement of essential raw materials for the centre on the alluvium is also bound to have played a significant rôle. It has been suggested that such expansion had to be based on a political unification of the alluvial Mesopotamian plain itself, an area which is otherwise characterized through most of the third and second millennia by a decentralized city-state pattern (Algaze 1986, p. 289).

Even more unclear is the background for the collapse of this Uruk network in the north-west, a breakdown which led to the abandonment of Habuba Kabira and the destruction of other sites. These events can be dated unequivocally to late Uruk IV, i.e. before the bulk of the textual documentation from Uruk itself.

Algaze suggests that we are faced with one of the recurring ‘breakdowns’ which characterize Mesopotamian history:

due to the timeless and essentially unresolvable conflict caused by the regularization and intensification of economic demands, mostly of an

agricultural nature, on a chronically unstable alluvial environment (1987, p. 289).

He connects the termination of the expansion towards the north-west with signs of a crisis at Uruk itself, but Potts has indicated that the contact broken off with the north-west appear to be to some extent replaced with a differently oriented network towards the south where contacts with Mesopotamia are attested from sites in the Persian Gulf and Oman (Potts 1986).

At Uruk itself the centuries between 3300 and 3100 cannot be described except in very broad terms. We have a sequence of public buildings from Uruk, including terraced temples, and during the late Uruk period these grew from relatively modest edifices to gigantic complexes where a single building could measure 85×55 m and be erected on a huge artificial platform (Heinrich 1982, pls 114–24). All the known texts have been found within the sacred precinct in Uruk.

### *The emergence of writing*

From the Uruk period and indeed earlier, calculi or counters made of clay have been discovered from a series of sites, including several which lie outside Mesopotamia proper, and it has been suggested that these objects formed part of a system of notation which may be seen as a logical precursor of writing, serving a similar purpose (see Schmandt-Besserat 1981).

There are some doubts about the interpretation of the early counters, predating the late Uruk period, since these have been found both in extremely ancient contexts, going back to the neolithic, at sites where complex accounting procedures seem unnecessary, and in archaeological contexts (such as graves) which are not so easily explained in terms of an administrative function of the counters (Dittmann 1986, pp. 333–34). However, the existence of the system in the Uruk period itself, attested primarily at Susa and Uruk, is not in doubt.

We seem to have a development beginning with a set of counters of clay which were given a variety of shapes, each one presumably not just representing a figure, but indicating the nature of the item counted. Such counters are occasionally found encased in a ball or bulla of clay which may have impressions of a cylinder seal (sometimes more than one) on its surface; the sealing obviously marks responsibility, since seals were the property of individuals (or in some cases of offices), and a clay ball with counters in it could function as a vehicle for the communication of information in time or space.

The next step was to provide the surface of the clay ball with impressions which represented the tokens inside it, so that opening it constituted an act of verification and control. And the final step in this sequence was then to dispense with the tokens completely and simply impress numerical signs in the surface of what now became a clay 'tablet'. When some genius then combined this purely numerical information with signs representing the items counted, such as the head of an ox or a pot of a distinctive shape, we are faced with what we must call true writing.

Bullae associated with counters as well as numerical tablets have been discovered at several sites in the north and north-west, Nineveh, Mari, Habuba, Jebel Aruda, and Tell Brak, as well as a series of sites on the Iranian plateau: Godin Tepe, Tepe Sialk, Tall-i-Ghazir, Chogha Mish, and Susa in Khuzistan (Schmandt-Besserat 1981, Vallat 1986, Van Driel 1982). From Tell Brak we even have two clay tablets, unfortunately unstratified, which appear to contain numerals and pictograms, and these are totally different from anything known from Uruk. It is therefore suggested that they may represent a stage of writing which has until now not been preserved anywhere else, or that they may represent an independent, north-western version of a pictographic script (see Jasim & Oates 1986). Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence available for the context of these counters, bullae and numerical tablets is sporadic and uncertain, but there can be no doubt that they formed part of an administrative system which further developed using the early writing.

The 'proto-Elamite' writing used on tablets found in Susa and on sites on the Iranian plateau, indeed as far away as Seistan (Amiet & Tosi 1978), represents a script which is in many respects similar to the contemporary Uruk III signs, but apparently not directly related to them. This script is supposed to have originated on the plateau (Vallat 1986, p. 339), and the possibility cannot be excluded that the examples available at the moment, primarily from Susa, reflect a development from a simpler stage, comparable to and perhaps contemporary with Uruk IV.

Precursors of writing, indeed written documents, are accordingly known from several places and regions in the ancient Near East at the end of the 4th millennium, and we may be in for new and surprising discoveries. At the moment, however, I feel inclined to subscribe to the view expressed by Powell that the inventor of the first system of writing 'was both a Sumerian and a citizen of Uruk' (1981, p. 422), and it follows that the earliest script has its basis in the sociopolitical developments which took place here.

### *The Uruk tablets*

The texts found in the sacred precinct Eanna, where we have temples dedicated to the skygod An and the leading goddess Inanna, form by far the largest group, and they must therefore be central to any attempted analysis of the socio-economic structure of the period. As already mentioned, they stem from at least two main phases, corresponding roughly to the building levels IV and III at Uruk, but they have all been found in secondary deposits as fill or in rubbish dumps. The internal chronology accordingly has to be determined to a large extent on the basis of palaeography and other "internal" criteria, since clear-cut dating on the basis of stratigraphy in most cases is impossible to establish. It seems, however, that it is possible to distinguish at least the two main groups without much uncertainty, whereas subgroups are difficult to determine (Nissen 1986a, 1986b).

Some 85 per cent of the documents are economic records, and the remaining roughly 15 per cent consist of so-called 'lexical texts', documents which are in the nature of sign lists, where the signs are ordered in accordance with some taxonomic principle. Unfortunately, the reasoning behind the ordering of the signs cannot in all instances



be recognised, but the later phase III texts are easier to grasp, since they often list, on separate tablets, signs which refer to such categories as birds, objects of metal or of wood, textiles, pots-and, of special interest here, titles and professions.

This list of professions (Civil 1969, pp. 3–12) acquired an astonishing prestige and popularity and was copied in scribal schools for more than 600 years, in spite of the fact that many of the titles and even signs in it were no longer used in normal practice, and it exists in more than 125 early copies from Uruk alone. It presents an ordered, apparently hierarchical list of political and social categories, beginning with a sign which in later tradition was rendered ‘king’, or ‘leader’; then follows a list of some 15 titles which include officials who appear to be responsible for ‘law’, ‘the city’, ‘the troops’, ‘ploughs’, and ‘barley’, as well as some priestly titles and ‘the chairman of the assembly’. In the next sections we find a series of items where professions (e.g. ‘smith’, ‘silversmith’, ‘shepherd’ and ‘herald’) are presented in conjunction with titles which must refer to such positions ‘overseers’ or ‘headmen’.

Nissen concludes from this ordering that we are faced with a carefully implemented, mature organizational structure where we find a two- or threetiered hierarchy, which shows the following levels: first, the simple profession; next, an intermediary level where officials are called ‘junior’ or ‘young’ plus the name of a profession; and finally the top level where we find persons referred to as ‘senior’ plus profession. The standardization of the titulary indicates that we are dealing with a set of officials who have the same type of rank in their relationship to a higher authority (Nissen 1976, p. 14).

The economic records all appear to reflect the workings of a centralized temple administration. The keywords found in many of them are BA, which means ‘to give’ (according to Nissen ‘distribution’), and GI, which means ‘to return’ (‘revenue’?).

There are texts which refer to one single transaction:

## 2 SHEEP TEMPLE DEITY “INANNA”

(see Nissen 1985, p. 357, Fig. 8).

There are also elaborate compositions which include several such transactions and give a summary and/or total, and we have lists which have been interpreted as ration lists, a genre which became very widespread in later periods. Peggy Green’s (1981) study of these records confirm Nissen’s analysis of the hierarchically structured Uruk society, and has added a lot of detail. She places great emphasis on the contrast between texts from the two levels IV and III, showing convincingly that texts were used in a much more elaborate way in the later phase, recording more information, more detail, and indeed new categories of information. The typical level III text therefore consists of several entries, organized in boxes or cases, and the surface is often divided up into columns. There appears to be no single entry texts from phase III at all, but that may be accidental, since we must assume that the normal procedure was the same here as in all other periods: a tablet is written to record one single transaction; later on this is incorporated into another record which combines a number of single entries, perhaps covering a short period of time, perhaps reflecting a certain type of transaction; and such records could

then again become incorporated in still more elaborate accounts which reflect the total activities of a certain office or individual during a specified period of time.

The level III tablets show that the transactions recorded became quite complex, 'involving more hierarchical levels of personnel and more departmental or distributional levels' (Green 1981, p. 362). The redistributive nature of the economic system is well documented, and of special interest are the ration lists which are attested only from the later phase. Nissen has pointed out that we may have other indications of the rationing system from this time, for during the whole period we find enormous numbers of crude clay pots which contain about 2 litres, pots which could be interpreted as the containers for the standard daily ration of barley handed out to workers in temples and other large establishments (Nissen 1985, p. 350).

The texts primarily refer to cattle, metals, wool, and textiles, and there is documentation for large herds of cattle in and around Uruk. References to quantities of metals, both crude and precious, as well as the archaeological evidence for an abundance of these commodities in southern Mesopotamia indicate the existence of links to other geographical areas. The plain itself is fertile, but it is entirely lacking in stone and metal, even in wood fit for construction purposes, and these commodities accordingly had to be imported. This early phase therefore provides the first example of the classic Mesopotamian situation which was marked by extensive foreign trade, where metals, wood, stone, and luxury items were imported in exchange for wool and especially textiles (Nissen 1985, p. 360, Larsen 1987a).

### **The logic of writing: Uruk and Peru**

Dittmann (1986) has attempted to reconstruct the administrative hierarchy in early Susa on the basis of an analysis of the sealings found on the clay bullae associated with the counters. His basic assumptions are, first, that the sealings identified the senders to the recipients of the bullae; and secondly, that the motifs on the sealings reflect the status of its user/owner. Since bullae could have more than one sealing impressed on them, it is further assumed that these indicate different hierarchical levels, and the resulting structure includes a leading person connected with what is called 'the army—and hunting-unit'; 'industrial' and 'storage' units are connected with 'the Temple/Palace-unit'.

These features of Susa social structure are contemporary with the early Uruk IV phase, and they are (not surprisingly) in accord with the picture reconstructed from the tablets. Dittmann's analysis indicates in a general way the level of complexity which could be served and sustained by a system of recording which still did not use a real system of writing. It is very clear, as has been pointed out repeatedly, that the seal was a highly important element in the administrative system—as it continued to be in the succeeding periods. It is presumably also not accidental that when writing was introduced, tablets were rarely sealed in these early bureaucracies.

In the Uruk period it seems that the system of counters was drastically expanded from a very simple pattern of a few shapes to an elaborate structure which included scores of different types of counters. This may be viewed as an attempt to infuse more

information into it, an attempt which appears to have overburdened its capacity (Green 1981, p. 362).

These simple observations led Nissen to conclude that

by the time writing appeared, most steps towards a higher, civilized form of living had been taken. Writing appears merely as a by-product along the course of rapid development towards a complex life in towns and states (1985, p. 360).

Also Green recognizes that writing was introduced into an already complex culture:

the socio-economic basis—a stratified society, a redistributive system, and voluminous transactions—preexisted in ancient Mesopotamia. So, too, did the demand for accountability and record-keeping, attested by the widespread use of tokens (*calculi*) and seals (1981, p. 367).

However, Green is more willing than Nissen appears to be to see writing as an essential technology which formed a necessary part of the basis for the bureaucratic structure that was subsequently built up:

The emergence of a large-scale, centralized, bureaucratic institution, however, might itself have been a consequence of the creation of the tools which empowered its functioning. Certainly, writing enabled the administration to grow and, through written liability, to maintain direct authority over even the lowest levels of personnel and clientele (Green 1981, p. 367).

As pointed out earlier, Wheatley objected to the idea of urbanism being defined by the absence or presence of literacy and he mentioned that to do so would exclude the Andean states, the Inca empire. It may therefore at this point be relevant to introduce comparative evidence from the Inca state in Peru, since this very elaborate political system is brought into the argument as an example of a state or empire which could apparently reach a very high degree of complexity without access to a proper system of writing.

In fact, the evidence from Peru compared with Mesopotamia shows that we should speak of the importance of a system of recording and notation rather than necessarily of 'writing'. The Inca state made use of the so-called '*quipus*', strings with knots which could, at a basic level, function as counters for recording numerical information, somewhat in the same way as the clay tokens from the ancient Near East. But it is apparent that these *quipus* allowed an elaborate administrative system to function, where officials could keep track of deliveries to storehouses, set up and consult inventories, etc.

Officers were established in each of the districts, who, under the title of *quipucamayus*, or 'keepers of the quipus', were required to furnish the government with information on various important matters. One had charge of the revenues, reported the quantity of raw material distributed among the labourers, the quality and quantity of the fabrics made from it, and the amount of stores, of various kinds, paid into the royal magazines. Another exhibited the register of births and deaths, the marriages, the number of those qualified to bear arms, and the like details in reference to the population of the kingdom. These returns were annually forwarded to the capital, where they were submitted to the inspection officers acquainted with the art of deciphering these mystic records. The government was thus provided with a valuable mass of statistical information, and the skeins of many colored threads, collected and carefully preserved, constituted what might be called the national archives (Prescott 1847, p. 134).

After the conquest the Spanish administrator often referred to quipu records which gave them information of the obligations of provinces towards the central authorities in the Inca capital (see Murra 1982). The courts of the conquerors, even the royal *audiencias*, without hesitation accepted sworn testimony based on the quipus, even when these referred to affairs which went relatively far back in time. This system was accordingly quite efficient and capable of handling great amounts of information (there is a reference to a quipu which has a knot in the 10 000th place; see Rowe 1946, p. 326), with a fair degree of complexity.

The Inca state made use of special 'annalists', officials who were charged with the duty to record the important events in each province, scholars who were entrusted with the history of the ruling clan, and 'poets' who performed songs and ballads at the court, retelling the most glorious events in the history of the Inca state. Even in this purely oral sphere, the quipus could be used as a 'system of mnemonics', since the colour code was connected with abstract concepts. The quipu could therefore function as a mnemonic aid, affording 'great help to the memory by way of association' (Prescott 1847, p. 135), and it was used even for the learning of historical narratives, where 'the quipus served the chronicler to arrange the incidents with method and to refresh his memory' (Prescott 1847, p. 136; see also Rowe 1946, p. 326). It has been concluded from such observations that

the Andean peoples possessed substitutes for writing which were so satisfactory that they probably never felt the need for anything more elaborate (Rowe 1946, p. 325).

The comparison with the early Near Eastern system of calculi seems at first sight obvious and compelling: it appears very probable that the counters had functions which were identical or at least very similar to those fulfilled by the quipus. It is of course unfortunate that there is no corroborating archaeological evidence so that counters could be linked in an unequivocal way with major administrative

buildings, for instance in Uruk itself, but this may be due to the accidents of excavation. However, I would suggest that it is meaningful to compare the quipu system with the earliest so-called 'true writing' from Uruk.

The script which developed out of the combination of numerical signs and drawings was obviously of an ideographic nature, where each sign stood for an object or concept. For some 600 years its use was restricted to economic/ administrative records (plus the lexical lists which played a rôle in the scribal education), and this fact alone explains several characteristic features in the system. It was not a graphic rendering of speech, but rather a mnemonic system which depended on an oral complement. Green has pointed out that the script of the Uruk texts, culminating in the level III texts, formed a kind of 'visually oriented' system as opposed to a 'linguistically oriented' one, as it later became. Her analysis has shown how these early texts made use of a whole series of graphical devices such as tablet shape, division of the surface into boxes, columns, rows, etc., use of tall, wide or narrow columns, subdivisions of boxes, formats for summaries and totals etc. (Green 1981, pp. 361–3). Such features are not unknown to anyone who has ever attempted to fill in a form or to extract information from a statistical yearbook. It is obvious that such modern records are indeed not 'linguistically oriented', since they consist mainly of logograms (Arabic and Roman numerals), and no one could make much sense of them by simply reading them aloud. 'Reading' such texts involves introducing many words which do not appear in the documents as such, but which can be inserted on the basis of an interpretation of graphic indicators such as lines, paper colour, size and shape of the form, and organization of the information itself (see Larsen 1986).

In fact, early Uruk writing does not unequivocally represent any specific language, since logograms can be read in any language. The introduction of syllabic elements in the texts, i.e. the initial spelling out of infixes and suffixes, etc. is not clearly attested in these early texts. The written message does not in a direct way represent a spoken one, a principle which remained basically valid for most of the next millennium in texts written in Sumerian. Only the grammatical elements which are absolutely indispensable to the identification of a phrase were written, and when literary texts begin to be written down around 2500 BC even they make use of basically the same system. This means that the text as we have it appears to give a sequence of cues, presumably designed to aid a person who was preparing for an oral performance—which is not too far removed from the use to which the quipus could be put. An isolated archaic version of such a literary composition is accordingly only understandable to someone who is already thoroughly familiar with the full text (see Civil & Biggs 1966).

Uruk writing was a more powerful system of recording than the quipus, simply because it enabled any given record to contain more explicit information, including, for instance, names of persons and places. It was therefore capable of sustaining a more complex bureaucratic machine, but it should be kept in mind that it may have been possible to reach a comparable degree of complexity by way of specialized officials in the Inca state. One cannot help but wonder whether a more explicit system of notation or a script of some kind would not have become a necessity for a further development and elaboration of the Inca state.

## Conclusion

There is no need to refute monocausal, crude explanations which nobody is willing to defend anyway. The emergence of writing does not *create* or *cause* social complexity, the rise of the state, urbanism, slavery, or freedom. It is, on the other hand, what Kathleen Gough so nicely called “an *enabling factor*” (1968, p. 84, see also Street 1984, and Larsen 1987b).

The Mesopotamian and Peruvian evidence points to the complexity in the relationship between writing and speech, and between the aspect of recording and of communication, a complexity which serves as a warning against ethnocentric schemes of explanation. Writing is not a simply defined entity, and our preconceived notions based on our own alphabetic experience cannot be transferred to other historical situations where other types of writing may be used in quite different ways, serving various purposes.

Some of the chapters in this book deal with societies and historical situations where writing was used in basically the same way as in Mesopotamia. Thus, Nieke, [Chapter 14](#), is on precisely the same kind of terrain in her study of the early Scottish kingdom of Dalriada:

The introduction and use of writing by the secular authorities should be seen as just one of a series of measures these early rulers were taking to strengthen their control over the kingdom.

In the particular historical situation literate practices, reflected in the received corpus of annals, kinglists and genealogies, and ‘civil surveys’, were part of a wider framework of political control mechanisms which included some measure of regulation of the production, distribution, and use of prestige goods and imports.

Mesopotamia is unusual in one respect, however, since it represents perhaps the most stubbornly bureaucratic use of writing known from any ancient civilization. For some 600 years after the introduction of true writing it was used exclusively by the administrators. And from one period of some 75 years at the very end of the third millennium, the so-called ‘Ur III period’, we have hundreds of thousands of such administrative texts which present an incredibly elaborate structure of administrative procedures. Single documents could regulate transactions involving tens of thousands of persons, and at the same time the loss of half a pound (0.25 kg) of wool from a warehouse would be discovered and accounted for with a frightening inevitability. So it seems fair to say that the potential of this technology for its use as a controlling device was realized to the full in Mesopotamia.

On the other hand, writing was not used for display purposes for many centuries, in direct contrast to the situation found in Egypt. Some of the chapters show that writing played a significant rôle also as a system of symbols which stood as public statements of the unique rights and powers of the rulers, but of course, writing is only one of many such public display systems, together with, for example, architecture and ritual.

Driscoll’s (Ch. 13) analysis of the Pictish stones clearly indicates the importance of the control by an élite of a symbolic system which displays the privileges held by the

ruling class in a given society. Even though he deals with symbols which did not constitute a system of writing, there is a remarkable agreement between his analysis of these standing stones in Scotland and Baines's (Ch. 12) of Egyptian display inscriptions, with Baines making the point that

the system of display...sustained the ruler's and the élite's position, either through the image of a world view and of themselves that it conveyed to others, or through the élite's exclusive access to it, or through both

and Driscoll assuming that

such a symbolic system would be under the control of a political and/or religious élite by virtue of their superior access to material and cultural resources and that they would employ it to promote and secure their authority.

It appears that writing was used in this fashion by 'knowledgeable social actors' (Driscoll, Ch. 13), which leads to the conclusions drawn by Harbsmeier in his study (Ch. 15) of recent inventions of writing. For the illiterate, writing is not just a technology of communication, it has a reality in the field of magic, as pointed out by Niekke for early Scotland. And the conscious, deliberate use of the technology of writing, whether for display purposes and maybe in conjunction with ritual, or in the context of miracles and religious teaching, obviously has a central place in any analysis of the relationship between literacy and power.

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*Literacy, social organization, and the  
archaeological record: the case of early Egypt*

JOHN BAINES

**Introduction**

The use of writing in ancient civilizations poses problems for archaeology, whose most powerful models and methods of analysis are designed for unwritten materials. The separation of the written and the unwritten is felt to be profound. A historian and an archaeologist of the ancient Near East state that ‘The creation and preservation of ancient texts and of other artifacts result from—and therefore signify—different intentions, behaviors and processes’ (Carter & Stolper 1984, p. vii). For literate cultures, archaeology has until recently been seen as an adjunct, with social analysis being chiefly the domain of history. The place of writing in society and its effect on society or interaction with it are central to the expanding field of literacy studies, which relies on the written word and on hypotheses or reports about relations between the literate and the non-literate, the written and the unwritten (for the ancient Near East see Goody 1986). Within the archaeological context, however, written documents are common and important artefacts (see Yoffee 1979, 1980, Dunnell & Wenke 1980), and writing has an effect on society—however disputed this may be—which should influence the archaeological record. Interpretative models should therefore take the presence or absence of writing into account.

This theoretical requirement is difficult to meet, because of uncertainties about effects of writing. It is desirable to work in two directions: to analyse potential effects of writing on society and traces of them that could be recovered in the archaeological record (many ‘effects’ will leave no archaeological trace); and to examine the record for features additional to writing that may be related to its presence. Such strategies bring archaeology and history together in so far as both rely on constructing models within which incomplete material can be comprehended and exploited. A single model or pattern should not be set up: literacy is not a unitary, well defined phenomenon, and societies that use writing vary enormously in their structure and material record.

It is difficult, and not necessarily desirable, to define ‘social organization’ precisely in this context. I explore characteristics of Egyptian society in relation to writing, but take a definition of its social type, as a centralized monarchy with a literate, office-holding élite, as a point of departure; refinement is desirable, but dispensable here.

The theoretical sophistication of Yoffee's arguments (1979), relating especially to ancient Mesopotamia, throws into relief problems in formulating general models of state and 'civilization' formation: some of the models he dismisses might serve for Egypt, whose state was very different from those of Mesopotamia. Just as literacy is not a single phenomenon with a single range of effects, so there need be no single trajectory of state formation.

Much of this chapter is taken up with presenting early evidence for writing in Egypt. At the end, archaeological and theoretical issues are reviewed. The topic relates more to institutional and administrative aspects of writing than to its properties as a symbolic system, but the latter remain relevant to almost any study. I focus on the first four dynasties (c. 2950–2465 BC). This is the time of evolution of the script and its basic uses and of intensified centralization of society, and thus exemplifies some key problems; later periods must be omitted.

### **The context of writing**

Writing is an aid to communication (including display) and social organization, and its origin is in complex forms of both. It may be employed primarily to communicate at a distance in space and hence to serve complex networks, as in trade, and it may serve storage and communication in time, so that it enhances administration and control; often it does both. Its chief focus can be non-material, on symbolic or other-worldly ends. Whatever its long-term effects, its first cause or contexts is mostly an established and developing complex system in a group of polities or within a polity. The polities or polity mostly share their culture, and scripts, languages, and cultures go together. The function of extended communication can be served without great cultural involvement and can cross cultural boundaries. For millennia, forerunners of writing were present in the Near East without apparent major cultural consequences over the region (e.g. Schmandt-Besserat 1977, see also Jasim & Oates 1986), and to this day writing is used with marginal effect in some noncentralized societies (Scribner & Cole 1981), as Murray suggests that it was in early Greece, where the drive for innovation may have come from elsewhere (Murray 1980, pp. 98–9). The stimulus to create writing predates the state, and for the periods considered here must be ascribed to social, cognitive, and economic changes in prehistory. The combination of writing with central administration and control is culturally more powerful, if seldom more innovative. Although many constraints may restrict writing's absorption and expansion of a cultural repertory, it has great potential here, which the élite who use or direct it for administration seldom fail to exploit. It can be integrated with other systems of display to propound and immortalize the dominant ideology.

It is therefore useful to separate centralized uses and origins of writing from non-centralized ones. I am concerned with a centralized example, but the opposite should be mentioned. Ancient Mesopotamia (from the late fourth millennium BC), early north-west Semitic writing in Syria and Palestine (late second to early first millennium BC; Hawkins 1979, pp. 157–64, Millard 1985, 1986, Demsky 1985), and Greece (c.

7th-5th centuries BC; opposing views Murray 1980, pp. 90–9, Havelock 1982) are cases of the invention and spread of scripts through culturally uniform but politically decentralized regions. In all, writing stimulated development and contributed vitally to the definition of the cultural and geographical area that constituted a single civilization (for Mesopotamia see Oppenheim 1977, Machinist 1986), but it did not favour political unification, and the social and political structure of the different areas varied, both in type and complexity and in its relation to writing. Eventual attempted unifications of Mesopotamia, perhaps a millennium after the invention of writing, and of Greece in the 4th century BC, can hardly be ascribed to writing, although they were influenced by the regional definitions encouraged by it. The effect of writing on the archaeological record varies enormously, from a dominant presence in Mesopotamia (Yoffee 1979) through widespread attestation in Greece to sparse and variable evidence in Syria and Palestine. Because so much depends on accidents of preservation and the medium used, these patterns tell us little about the use or spread of writing in these societies, but they are not comparable with ancient Egypt, from which the majority of the vast legacy of writing is monumental; this record is skewed by preservation, but it remains clear that the Egyptians produced a unique amount of monumental writing. In the other societies, writing was in varying measures an instrument of communication, social control, and cultural expression, but it was not entirely identified with a centralized political system and a single élite.

### **Early Egyptian writing**

As a context for the independent origin of writing (whether this was inspired from outside or not), Egypt was at an extreme of centralization (cf. Baines 1983). Writing came at a late stage in the formation of a centralized state. During perhaps a couple of centuries there was a progression from scattered agricultural settlements with just a few concentrations of population, through the emergence of regional states both in Egypt (Kaiser & Dreyer 1982, pp. 242–5) and possibly in Nubia (Williams 1987), to the earliest ‘nation state’. Like its predecessors, the late ‘predynastic’ Egyptian state was only marginally urban (evidence cited for example by Kemp 1977 is not comparable with that from Mesopotamia). The nation state existed for some generations—up to ten rulers—before the 1st dynasty (c. 2950 BC; Kaiser & Dreyer 1982, pp. 260–9).

Throughout this time the writing system was evolving; there is no certain trace of writing that might have preceded the centralized state. In the perspective of later times, Egyptian ‘history’ crystallized with the 1st dynasty, which marks the end of a transformation that separated dynastic Egypt radically from its predynastic forerunner, but that transformation had more to do with the development of ideology and display—including writing—and perhaps with a change of dynasty, than with political change. The division of ‘history’ from what went before seems to have been created by the introduction of written annals that were later preserved. This development culminates the appropriation of writing for ideology—as well as administration—but advances visible in contemporary writing are greater in display than in administrative materials, which were already more highly evolved.

The invention of writing must thus be seen in the context of the political, administrative, and ideological development of a unitary but dispersed state with extended lines of communication. The detail of this context is becoming clearer through continuing excavations, especially of Günter Dreyer at Abydos and Michael Hoffman at Hierakonpolis (presented in a colloquium at the British Museum in July 1987). Whereas the work at Abydos and at Minshat Abu 'Omar in the northeastern delta (Dietrich Wildung, BM colloquium) suggests a high degree of integration of the country from well before the 1st dynasty, in the middle of the Naqada II period, the material from Hierakonpolis shows developing regional forms which seem less advanced for the same date but clearly exemplify state formation and the elaboration of a royal ideology. What is uncertain is what precise forerunners writing had. The traditional hypothesis that its invention was derived from Mesopotamia (examined, for example, by Ray 1986), is based on slender evidence, and even its chronological basis is assailable (Jerrold S. Cooper, pers. comm.). The alternative proposed by Arnett (1982) and Fairervis (1983), that it developed from traditional signs and emblems used on pottery and in other pictorial representation, is plausible enough in that the context is one of extended communication and the exchange or delivery of goods, but little in their detailed arguments is satisfactory (see also Ray 1986, p. 309). These questions and linguistic aspects of the invention of writing are considered by Ray, who does not, however, draw out the implications of the separation of state formation from the origin of writing, or consider its rôle in developing administration; examples of administration cited by him are more ceremonial and ideological than practical.

The earliest writing preserved, which probably dates to the late fourth millennium BC, consists of signs on pottery, probably indicating royal ownership (e.g. Kaiser 1964, p. 113, fig. 7). The signs are either painted or incised and their forms are closer to those of later cursive writing than to the monumental script, hieroglyphs, whose origin may be slightly later than that of the cursive. The most striking of this material may be inscribed pottery of King 'Irihor', perhaps the fourth predecessor of the 1st dynasty, which shows the administrative division of the country into two, and a developed system for the notation of deliveries for the royal household or burial (Kaiser & Dreyer 1982, pp. 232–5). This primacy of cursive and administrative uses (cf. Schenkel 1983) is reflected in the invention of the artificial medium of papyrus within a century or two of writing itself (Baines 1983, p. 593, n. 4; only an uninscribed papyrus preserved). Papyrus was surely not the only administrative writing material but, in part because of the possibility of creating large pieces, it was well suited to extensive records and went with an elaborate tabular presentation of documents (Helck 1974a, cf. Posener-Kriéger 1976). It was never very cheap (cf. Janssen 1975, pp. 447–8) and before Graeco-Roman times seems not to have fostered the kind of mass use of documents known, for example, from the 3rd dynasty of Ur in Mesopotamia (c. 2200–2000 BC; cf. Hallo & Simpson 1971, pp. 81–3). Early administration probably used small records on miscellaneous materials, of which grand examples are the ivory tags with year names from royal tombs and related contexts (e.g. Petrie 1900, 1901 *passim*, Emery 1938, pls 17–18; 1961, p. 194, fig. 112), with papyrus serving for longdistance transmission and for complex record-keeping. Almost all the contexts from which early writing has been found are royal or close to the rulers. Literacy cannot

have been confined to the king and his entourage, but it must have been extremely restricted, perhaps including only them and the not very large number of scribes necessary for administrative purposes. Inscribed objects include seals and seal impressions, the ivory tags, stone vases (e.g. Lacau & Lauer 1959–61) and other prestige objects with small inscriptions (Fischer 1972, pp. 5–15, Whitehouse 1987), and rare large-scale monumental inscriptions (see in general Kaplony 1963). The chief administrative purpose of writing appears thus to have been to mark ownership and destination and to tabulate economic activities. It was not used for continuous texts, and hence presumably not for what we would call letters, even though no fundamental change was necessary for it to acquire such functions, which were introduced in the 3rd–4th dynasties (c. 2650/2575 BC; cf. Baines 1988, pp. 131–3). Until writing encoded continuous language, it was scarcely an autonomous vehicle of administration and will have needed to be accompanied in its transmission by people who supplied a verbal context for the information transmitted; such people were probably often themselves literate.

Rather later than writing is attested on pottery, it occurs on the monuments of the latest predynastic kings (c. 3050–2950 BC). This monumental use is continuous with inscribed luxury objects and sealings and is integral to an important and closely circumscribed system of display and of the presentation of values. Rules of decorum (Baines 1985, pp. 68–75, 277–305) may have limited the currency of this system, whose prime early exemplars are votive objects from temples (notably the Scorpion macehead and Narmer palette, e.g. Smith 1981, p. 33, figs 12–14, Lange & Hirmer 1967, pls 4–5); even the most ‘public’ preserved mortuary object of the time, the early 1st dynasty tomb stela of King Wadj (c. 2900 BC; e.g. Lange & Hirmer 1967, pl. 6), will not have been seen by many. But whether or not the system of display, which may have extended to perishable objects, was widespread, it sustained the ruler’s and the élite’s position, either through the image of a world view and of themselves that it conveyed to others, or through the élite’s exclusive access to it, or through both. Its better known Old Kingdom forms, however, focus on royalty and exclude humanity from many concerns, restricting the displayed participation even of the élite in central values. There is too little earlier evidence to establish whether the same was always true. If it was, decorum and the scarcity of writing must count as being divisive in all periods and the scribal identity of the élite (see below) would involve some degree of ambivalence.

For centuries writing was restricted to notation (in administration) and display. This restriction cannot have been found crippling; if it had been, the necessary resources would not have been invested in the institution (cf. Cooper forthcoming), or the system would have been developed, as it later was.

Unlike many élites, that of early Egypt displayed no separate power bases, such as local land-holding or traditional allegiances of difference groups or regions, whether they had them or not. They were literate and had themselves depicted as scribes (Baines 1983, p. 580). In Egypt, this identification of the élite with writing restricted its autonomy, so that in early times there was no opposition between scribes and rulers. The written sign repertory and vocabulary were created for royalty and for a single definition of Egypt. A dissenting presentation was not possible and did not appear until

later, when continuous texts, with their less circumscribed context and content, were written; even then, it did not surface for centuries (e.g. Lichtheim 1973, pp. 85–6: public inscription of c. 2150 BC, or Old Kingdom private letters: Roccati 1982, pp. 288–94). This high degree of control conceals much, such as possible ethnic or linguistic diversity in the country (dialects were not recorded until late times, although they certainly existed).

The fruits of central control are visible in just a few monuments: royal tombs and their dependencies at Abydos (Kemp 1966, 1967, Kaiser & Dreyer 1982), a small number of grand ‘private’ tombs at Naqada (Stadelmann 1985, pp. 17–19—interprets as a royal tomb) and especially Saqqara (Emery 1938, 1939, 1949–58, Quibell 1923, see also Kaiser 1985a), votive deposits at Hierakonpolis (B. Adams 1974) and to a lesser extent Elephantine (Dreyer 1986, pp. 18–19; Buto is probably another major site: von der Way & Schmidt 1985); and wealthy cemeteries, without the massive tombs of Abydos and Saqqara, around the capital (Tarkhan: Petrie 1913–14, Abu Rawash: Klasens 1975 with refs; and especially Helwan: Saad 1947, 1951, 1969) and in the delta (Kroeper & Wildung 1985). For the 1st dynasty (c. 2950–2800 BC), preserved public inscriptions are confined to Abydos, where all but royal stelae were very crude (see e.g. Petrie 1900, pls 31–6; late 1st dyn. exception pl. 30), and a single, large-scale but clumsy example from Saqqara (Emery 1961, pl. 30a, Smith 1981, p. 40, fig. 21, Kemp 1967, pp. 26–8, fig. 2). Some 2nd dynasty stelae are known from Saqqara (e.g. Smith 1981, pp. 48–9, figs. 31–2, see also Kaplony 1963, p. 3, pls 138–40) and Helwan (Haeny 1971, Saad 1957). Administration can be studied from texts on sealings and small objects (e.g. Edwards 1971, pp. 35–40), while Egyptian objects with royal names from Palestine, principally of the 1st dynasty, testify to foreign trade or conceivably penetration abroad (e.g. Gophna 1976, 1978). It is difficult to estimate the numbers of the literate élite benefiting from this activity. The circle of owners of massive tombs, royal and non-royal, would have been in single figures at any one time, and the dependent tombs at Abydos, which included those of ‘retainers’ as well as perhaps high officials (cf. Kemp 1966), do not attest to large numbers in the literate élite. For the core élite buried at Abydos and Saqqara, there was the ‘official’ definition of the order of things in terms that included writing, but writing none the less offered little of general cultural utility and all connected discourse must have been oral. The slightly less prestigious cemeteries around the capital have yielded few inscribed objects, so that writing did not serve these people in the central focus of display and prestige—their burials—whether they were literate or not. The only references in writing to people below scribal status are in mentions of administrative units to which they may have belonged, and in symbolic depictions of defeated ‘subjects’ on early monuments (e.g. Smith 1981, p. 33, fig. 12).

The social organization of the élite—not to speak of the rest of the population—is virtually unknown. The central group was so small that it probably consisted chiefly of royal kinsmen, but important people such as Imhotep (see below) and Hezyre (Quibell 1913) in the 3rd dynasty and Metjen (Gödecken 1976) and Pehernefer (Junker 1939) in the early 4th were not royal. At the beginning of dynastic times, the ancient word *rht* ‘subjects’ applied to symbolically defeated people (see above); it was later contrasted with *p<sup>ct</sup>* “‘élite’” (cf. Helck 1960, pp. 5–16. *jrj-p<sup>ct</sup>* ‘member of the *p<sup>ct</sup>*’ was

the highest ranking title in the Old Kingdom, analogous to Tsarist Russian 'Prince', and might imply that in origin the ruling group were distinct in terms of ethnicity or kinship from the rest of the population, but this assertion need have little foundation in reality. The notional or real kinship basis of the élite persisted without great change until the end of the 4th dynasty. This basis was contemporary with, but had different implications from, the same people's assumed (and probably real) literacy and exercise of administrative office, and this tension surfaced in later times. The fact that it could be kept in control for some centuries is significant for Egyptian state formation (cf. Yoffee 1979, pp. 14–17).

This evidence for early state organization contrasts in two respects with that from later periods. First, the capital and a few other centres were dominant. No strong, uniform provincial administration is visible. Such a system could be the creation of the later early dynastic period or it could elude recognition in earlier times (compare Helck 1975, pp. 18–44, with Janssen 1978, pp. 225–7). Second, the superstructure of major centres overlays a large number of small cemeteries with simple graves (cf. Kessler 1982), which demonstrates that the population was spread over the whole country (cf. Butzer 1976, pp. 57–80), and many could afford to leave behind some memorial for posterity and for the next world. The chief archaeological feature that might point to literacy is the dominance of the capital, Memphis, which is reflected in a number of separate, socially demarcated cemeteries (I avoid the word 'city' because no urban site for the capital has been identified). The concentration of the élite at the capital probably relates to its prestige and to bureaucratic needs, but these latter must have been served by an effective system of levies and of transport, which will have brought a large non-literate population into the area of the capital. A little of the administration of this can be seen in preserved writing, which must be a minuscule fraction of what was produced. Writing and other forms of administration reinforced each other in the process of centralization.

There is no early dynastic evidence for non-élite writing and hardly any from the Old Kingdom (c. 2575–2150 BC)—nothing comparable with the quite widespread informal graffiti and inscriptions of early Greece (e.g. Murray 1980, pp. 91–7, Havelock 1982, pp. 185–207). In Egypt, one must look ahead to the 1st intermediate period (c. 2150–1800 BC) for a slightly broader range of material.

### **The 3rd–4th dynasties: development and its control**

The 3rd dynasty (c. 2650–2575 BC) is the first stage in a transformation of all aspects of the record. The use of writing expanded significantly. Royal and private monuments to include much more writing, and the style and arrangement of the script is near to 'classical' Old Kingdom forms (e.g. Firth *et al.* 1935, pls 15–17, 40–3, Wood 1978, Smith 1981, p. 63, figs 49–50). Royal reliefs at Heliopolis (Smith 1981, p. 64, fig. 51) and in Sinai (Gardiner *et al.* 1952–55, nos 1, 3, 4, Givon 1974) may show an expansion of public display, but only the latter were generally visible, and they were addressed as much to foreigners—a tangential public for writing—as to Egyptians; the temple reliefs also have 2nd dynasty forerunners (Quibell 1900, pl. 2). Developments such as these are often related to



the statement of the Graeco-Egyptian historian Manetho that in the reign of Djoser (c. 2630–2610 BC) the culture hero ‘<Imuthes>’-whose name is supplied in the text-‘devoted attention to writing’ (e.g. Baines 1983, p. 577). More or less ‘informal’ uses of writing preserved from this time include quarry marks on stone (Lauer 1936, pp. 242–5), an ostrakon with calculations for a flat arch from Djoser’s step pyramid complex (Lauer 1936, p. 174, fig. 200), and short graffiti on the first enclosure wall of his successor Sekhemkhet’s step pyramid complex (Goneim 1957, pls 11–13, including the name of Imhotep= Imuthes, pl. 13), where quarry marks are also frequent. These, however, were written by people working on the chief projects of the time, and the ‘literacy’ involved in making quarry marks could be minimal—although those who set up the system of marks needed more of it. This evidence may suggest that the organization of stone building, on a larger scale than anything attempted before in any medium, generated an appropriate administrative and technical use of writing, but by itself it does little more. Thus, the proven range and volume of writing increased greatly, and the central élite displayed its scribal status (e.g. Quibell 1913, pls 29–32, Wood 1978). The most ‘advanced’ writing, including continuous sentences, is on reliefs from a chapel of Djoser at Heliopolis (Smith 1946, pp. 132–8). This shows how central religious material received a privileged treatment; from then on, religious texts could have been written, but it is impossible to establish exactly when they began to be recorded. Contemporary administrative writing and monumental decoration did not go very far beyond earlier norms, although the tomb of Hezyre shows the potential for change (Quibell 1913, pls 15–22).

It is difficult to separate 1st-2nd dynasty material archaeologically from that of the 3rd dynasty, so that the impact of the latter’s rule in the provinces can hardly be studied. Noteworthy monuments of the period and of the early 4th dynasty are an uncertain number of small, non-sepulchral step pyramids at sites throughout the country (Dreyer & Kaiser 1980, Stadelmann 1985, p. 79, pls 20–2, C.W.Griggs, pers. comm.), and five very large private tombs at Beit Khallaf (Kaplony 1975), a little north of Abydos, from which no monument of the period is known apart from a pyramid. Major élite mortuary sites are reduced to Saqqara, Beit Khallaf, and probably Helwan, but it is not known whether this concentration applied further down the social scale. Only the step pyramids are at all evenly spread; centralization of wealth seems more pronounced than earlier, as may have been necessary for the very large building projects. Official titles show that the developed structure of the provinces or ‘nomes’ of later times, which divided the country into 35–40 units of roughly comparable size, existed from early in the dynasty (cf. Helck 1974b, pp. 199–202 (pp. 49–53 tend to place the process earlier); Fischer 1977, pp. 408–9). Except near Abydos, provincial administrators must have had no monuments, or they erected them around the capital.

In comparison with the 3rd dynasty, the 4th (c. 2575–2465 BC) shows further advances in writing and in decorative display, just as it built on the former’s achievements in stone building to produce architecture of a new order of size and type of design—the pyramid complexes of Dahshur and Giza. The earliest long inscriptions on private monuments date to the beginning of the dynasty (Gödecken 1976 with refs, Junker 1939). By now, administrative writing recorded complete sentences, and so

had a much increased potential for action for a distance, and for impersonality, because oral messages no longer had to accompany written communication.

The use of writing in display also expanded. The mortuary temples of Snofru at Dahshur (c. 2575–2550 BC; Fakhry 1961, Stadelmann 1985, p. 104) had a number of relief themes in common with later times, as probably did that of Khufu (c. 2550–2525 BC; cf. Goedicke 1971), while private tombs of the beginning of the dynasty at Maidum (Petrie 1892) and Saqqara (Lepsius *nd*, pls 3–7) contain the later scenic repertory in essence. In both cases, however, 3rd dynasty precursors are possible, as is shown by the Djoser material and the tomb of Hezyre (Quibell 1913). Among material transmitted on papyrus, certain sacred items, such as a list of gods of the Memphite area, may go back to the 3rd dynasty (Baines 1988, pp. 131–3), and ritual texts could also have been recorded, but the discursive use of writing for other traditional matter seems to be much later, except possibly for medical treatises (cf. Westendorf 1966, p. 27). Here, the royal Pyramid Texts of the late 5th–8th dynasties (c. 2350–2125 BC; Faulkner 1969) provide ample evidence of texts of great age, but there is no firm evidence of which they were first written (see Altenmüller 1972, pp. 76–8, 279, for uncertain arguments on the earliest Pyramid Texts), and they do not demonstrate the existence of a wide written repertory of high culture. Most culture continued to be oral, while the socially pluralizing possibilities of writing for private and individual purposes are unknown before much later times. Scarcity and functionality still dominated the use of writing. A rather different question is whether the technical and architectural achievements of the pyramids required written texts. The surveying and calculation involved in construction, as well as computing the requirements for stone and so forth, are notable achievements, but they are based on simple mathematical procedures (e. g. Robins & Shute 1982, 1985) and may owe more to tabular and graphical skills than to texts; in accuracy of orientation, the pyramids do not surpass some neolithic structures in western Europe (although they do surpass them in geometrical execution).

Provincial administration is visible now both in titles and in the official presentation of the proper order of things. Series of offering bearers in the mortuary temple of Snofru's southern pyramid represent estates located in the various provinces which were to produce mortuary offerings for the temple in perpetuity (Fakhry 1961, pp. 17–58, cf. Jacquet-Gordon 1962). The owners of the chief private inscriptions held land in a number of nomes, either because the king wished to avoid their having a single power base or because men of their status stood above provincial affairs; either way, they were buried at the capital.

The structure of nomes is so regular and logical that it might have been designed by the author of central place theory. Its framework and the titles of administrators testify to some reality in the system—which must have administered the country efficiently to make the period's achievements possible—but it is not an archaeological reality. The 4th dynasty is the time of greatest concentration on the king and the capital, as is visible in the pyramids, the largest monuments ever constructed in Egypt. In addition to the king, a circle of high officials, many of them his kinsmen (cf. Helck 1968, pp. 50–61), was buried around the pyramids in grandiose but much smaller tombs. There are probably more tombs of high officials at Giza than are known for

comparable spans of the early dynastic period (for computations of size and significance see Kanawati 1977), as well as smaller numbers of important ones at Maidum, Dahshur, and Saqqara, all of which had pyramids. In their stone construction (except at Maidum, Petrie 1892, pp. 11–22), these tombs are sharply offset against any that may have belonged to lower officials. Against all this, not a single provincial tomb of consequence is dated to the 4th dynasty, and virtually no cemeteries of simple graves have been assigned to the period. In the mortuary record, which is almost all that is available, provincial Egypt is a blank for the period. Vast amounts of labour were brought to the capital to construct a rigidly defined and regimented setting for the afterlife of a small group of people (Lehner 1985). Those who provided that labour were so impoverished that they could not bury themselves appropriately for an afterlife of their own, while those who supervised their labours either belonged to the group buried in the monuments, in which case their values were centred on the capital, or they were themselves impoverished. There could have been an ethos according to which the burial of the king and his entourage guaranteed survival for the remainder of the country, as is suggested for the central group by the relationship on the ground between royal and other tombs, but such beliefs could not have been held in earlier times, from which large numbers of burials are known, and they are not attested from later. However centralization was legitimated in the 4th dynasty, it surely involved deprivation for most of the people. I consider below the rôle of writing in that deprivation (for numbers of literate see Baines & Eyre 1983).

The exclusivity of the ruling group of the central 4th dynasty is apparent in a manipulation of tomb decoration, that is, of freedom to use pictorial representation and writing in mortuary display. The most important nonroyal tombs of the period are east of the Great Pyramid at Giza (Reisner 1942, pp. 10–19, 27–36). Fragments suggest that the outer chapels of these were decorated with a range of ‘scenes of daily life’ (e.g. Simpson 1978, pl. 6b–d). Tombs on the west side belonging to people of marginally lesser status were in a less prominent and favourable position and had no visible decoration (their structures were almost as massive). In their offering chapels they had ‘slab stelae’ with a single scene of the deceased seated before a table with an enumeration of offerings, but these were walled up and invisible, and so are remarkably well preserved (e.g. Smith 1981, p. 84, figs 76–7). These tombs belonged to people of even higher status than the owners of the early 4th dynasty decorated tombs at Saqqara (e.g. Lepsius *nd*, pls 3–7). The obvious explanation for their lack of public decoration is that this form of display was restricted to the king and his closest entourage, all of whom were also both high officials and the administrative or hierarchical superiors of the other tomb owners. In a period when the potential of writing had been much enhanced and was exploited by the ruler and his associates, such a gesture is potent and autocratic; it states in another form the same overweening claims presented by the two great Giza pyramids (the equally massive pair of Dahshur pyramids, which belonged to a single king, does not have the same relationship with a surrounding necropolis). In the long term, discipline of this sort could not endure, and by the end of the 4th dynasty decoration of non-royal tombs was often more extensive. In another way, however, the restriction was maintained throughout the Old Kingdom. Even in the privileged tombs of the East Field, the decoration includes no explicitly religious

themes. This conforms to general rules of decorum, according to which only the king's monuments, among which were temples to the gods, could have decoration which depicted the gods directly (cf. Baines 1985, pp. 277–305).

For the outsider, this socially stratified restriction of writing and decoration is part of central political control, and in seeking to make a scarce resource still scarcer it is repressive. On another level, the strategy of stemming the spread of a 'democratizing' institution is typically conservative, a reaction paralleled for a later period of increasing diffusion of writing by Plato's condemnation of writing and its effects (*Phaedrus* 274C–275B; cf. Baines 1983, pp. 580, 594 n. 17). The élite's general perception need not have been the same, because the inherited scheme could have been accepted for the time being virtually without question. The point of departure is the central creation and control of writing, so that any diffusion may require specific sanction or decision. So long as continuous texts were not written outside a religious context, the limited expressive possibilities of writing might create relatively little interest in such diffusion (irrespective of any possible anti-writing ideology), but once they were present, they might bring a self-sustaining development, because it is difficult to control what is said in them—a point that was later exploited by some Egyptians. Since the system of decorum brackets writing and representation, these points apply to decoration too. In this wider context, the restriction of mid-4th dynasty tombs still looks repressive, coming as it did after a brief expansive time (the reign of Snofru, cf. also Baines in press) and attempted in vain to stem the diffusion of writing and display. Because of the system of decorum, people may not have considered for many centuries the possibilities of prayers to the gods or images of them in their tombs; these did not become common until after 1500 BC.

### **Extension and loosening of the system**

The later Old Kingdom (5th–6th dynasties, c. 2465–2150 BC) forms the logical conclusion to the development described so far, but for the argument here it is a pendant. During 300 years, the use of writing and the range of text types extended gradually, as did the amount of decoration on non-royal monuments. There was a slow increase in the number of cemeteries with simple graves. This diffusion and levelling of wealth accompanied a spread of power away from the capital to the provinces, and the two are probably connected. Some potential developments did not occur: the system of decorum changed only in detail throughout Egyptian history, and writing was not used for narrowly literary texts during the Old Kingdom. Decorum was probably so deeply embedded as to be an almost invisible assumption of the order of things—apart from having very detailed applications in particular decorative contexts; more complex considerations relate to the absence of literature (cf. Assmann 1983). Only very rarely does preserved writing escape from conventional constraints. A piquant example is a graffito on a vandalized late Old Kingdom private relief which seems to read 'You arrested me and beat my father. Now I shall be content(?). Who are you (now) to steal from me? May my father rest in peace' (Drioton 1950, p. 353)—in a divided and socially mobile context (and no doubt elsewhere), writing is well suited to reprisals.

The diffusion of writing and decoration parallels changes in the administrative hierarchy of the 5th and later dynasties. Whereas royal kin were dominant in the 4th dynasty, virtually none of the highest officials of later times were agnatic kin of the king, and for more than a millennium princes seem not to be attested during the reigns of their brothers or nephews (cf. Schmitz 1980). The non-royal élite of this period therefore defined and displayed their status as office-holders and bureaucrats; they appear to owe allegiance to institutions as well as to a dominant person, the king. Yet this development came with the new dynasty after the relaxation in the rules of display in the late 4th dynasty and an implied greater personal independence. It may seem a logical concomitant of the increased use of writing, but it was probably initiated by a political act. None the less, the act will have been constrained by the changing environment and requirements of the élite and thus depended to some extent on writing. The mid-4th dynasty restriction of display and the 5th dynasty institutionalization of the bureaucracy derive meaning from the literate context without being simply determined by it.

### Discussion

I now consider the development of writing in society and attempt to relate it to archaeological contexts and to the theoretical problems outlined at the beginning.

#### *The archaeological record*

The difference in wealth between the literate élite and the rest of the population was marked throughout the 1st-4th dynasties and reached its highest degree near the end of that period. The élite in burial, however, were only a small fraction of the literate élite. For some of the time, many wealthy tombs contained no inscriptions and few or no inscribed small objects, while the administrative use of writing must have required a scribal class of at least a few hundred at any time—more than the class who constructed large tombs—apart from the implausibility of all scribes throughout the country being members of the central élite. The archaeological material can thus be divided into that of the wealthy, of whom most were probably literate because they were all in state service, and the rest of the population, including many of the remaining literate. In the 1st-2nd dynasties, the less wealthy often had their own proper burials, while in the 3rd and especially the 4th they did not.

The record of the centralization of wealth is given extra relief by chances of preservation. Almost no settlement sites are known or excavated for this half millennium because most of them were sited in the alluvium, in which sites have not been preserved or have not been studied. Burials display status and so probably exaggerate differences in wealth, which might be less marked in settlements. The most remarkable deficiency of the record is probably the lack of an archaeologically identifiable capital. This may be due in part to failure to look for one, and a search would involve boring below the water table rather than excavation, but there cannot have been a nucleated accumulation comparable with that of urban sites in the Near

East. In theory, the royal residence shifted with the site of each new pyramid—over a distance of some 50 km—and some other settlements may also have moved, but even this extra factor does not account entirely for the absence of evidence; the capital was administratively paramount, and in death all the élite wished to be buried near it, but it must have been a dispersed and relatively modest set of settlements. The stereotype that the Egyptians put all their wealth into their burials at the expense of their dwelling places may be exaggerated, but it corresponds to a reality. Egypt appears like an estate focused on the king and his burial, and only marginally like an urban society. The tomb reliefs of the Old Kingdom élite suggest that they too had a manorial ideal life-style. Neither king nor élite erected great civic or personal monuments in the world of the living.

This deprivation of the living in favour of the dead (although the living need not have seen it in this way), of the poor in favour of the rich, of the rich in favour of the king, and, in theory, ultimately of the king in favour of the gods (cf. Baines *in press*), which reduced the mass of the population to archaeological invisibility, has a parallel outside Egypt that is probably caused by the predatory activities of Egypt. This is lower Nubia, whose A-Group culture, which was contemporary with later predynastic and very early dynastic Egypt, was obliterated, leaving an archaeological blank of up to 500 years, before the C Group appears in the 6th dynasty (Nordström 1972, pp. 29–32, Adams 1977 pp. 132–5, 1985, pp. 188–9, Williams 1987, pp. 16–17). In the narrow Nubian Nile valley, the chances of finding settlements or any archaeological sites are much greater than in Egypt, and the region has been exhaustively surveyed (cf. Adams 1985, p. 189). As Nordström argues (1972, p. 32), it is unlikely that the region was devoid of people. Rather, Egyptian raids and domination, for which there is good evidence (e. g. Trigger 1976, pp. 40–8, Adams 1977, pp. 135–40, Helck 1974c (figures taken too literally)), depressed the inhabitants' material culture below the archaeological 'threshold' for the methods of recovery used up to the 1960s. I suggest that the same may apply to Egypt itself during the central Old Kingdom.

The question of how far writing affects this development cannot be answered in isolation, but some points can be made about the context. Writing emerged soon after the rapid unification of the Egyptian state and helped to consolidate that unification. The degree of centralization and of regional impoverishment increased as writing became more widespread and could be used for more purposes. Innovations in writing, which came in stages and not through steady development, were probably intended to enhance administrative efficiency, and the ultimate degree of centralization was achieved after writing acquired the potential impersonality of recording messages that were comprehensible without an intermediary (this is not to imply that only 'practical' purposes determined its development). Although writing cannot be proved to be necessary for centralization, its participation in it is clear. It did not contribute so much to creating a discursive ideological context where centralization and the appropriation of resources could be legitimated, but it was used for the ideologically crucial purpose of presenting the world of the gods. By the 4th dynasty, continuous texts were not used in public contexts, while material presented in the system of decorum was too restricted in its contexts to speak to society in general. Public ideology must have continued to

be oral; architecture rather than representational art and writing reached out beyond the élite.

Another approach to the rôle of writing is to look at other aspects of material culture. This culture was very uniform throughout the country. The regional cultures of predynastic times were largely displaced by the unifying late Naqada II-III (cf. Kaiser 1985b). By the early 1st dynasty, other processes of differentiation emerged. Flint and decorative hard stone vase technology were developed to extraordinary levels (e.g. Emery 1939, pl. 11, 1961, pl. 40 (flint), pls 33, 35-9 (stone vases); stone vase repertory: el-Khouli 1978), but the resulting products were destined chiefly for the tomb. The same applies to copper, in which magnificent vases, jugs, and bowls were made (e.g. Emery 1961, pls 41, 43) in addition to tools and weapons (Emery 1938, pls 20-2, 1961, pls 42, 44-5). Painted or otherwise decorated ceramics, which had been important in Naqada I-II (c. 4000-3000 BC), lose almost all significance; although a few painted jars occur as late as the 3rd dynasty (Egypt Exploration Society excavations at north Saqqara: imitation of stone rather than autonomous decoration), virtually all production was in plain functional designs that impress by their quantity and uniformity (e.g. Emery 1961, pls 12-13, 20), not through their aesthetic qualities, although some manufacture was of a high standard (e.g. Bourriau 1981, nos. 6-8, 83-8). Decorated pottery is a luxury product that is widespread in many societies and tends to have local traditions; in almost all periods, Nubian pottery exhibited these possibilities (e.g. Bourriau 1981, nos. 193-225). The standardized and centralized culture of dynastic and Graeco-Roman Egypt mostly ignored them and with them the communicative potential of decoration, perhaps because it fell outside the 'official' and more explicit decorative system of decorum. Vessel forms in pottery imitated stone or metal; even some stone vase shapes look as if they were designed for metal (e.g. Emery 1961, pls 35, 38-9; Saad 1969, pl. 28, Smith 1981, p. 38, Fig. 20). Stone vases—not to speak of metalware—were primarily an élite product (but see Caton-Thompson & Gardner 1934, pp. 98-9), so that the effect of this tendency is to empty non-élite pottery of symbolic content, except as imitations. These imitations were in turn often relevant chiefly to the tomb, to which most could not aspire.

The side of this development that can hardly be observed is the development of technology for everyday purposes in agriculture, hunting, fishing, crafts, and so forth. Most discussion of the use of copper relates to prestige applications, such as the cutting of hard stones with copper saws (e.g. Clarke & Engelbach 1930, pp. 203-4) and other techniques developed for large-scale sculpture and stone building. This 'advanced' technology contrasts with modest Old Kingdom sites, including one at Giza, whose material culture is typologically distinct from, but otherwise comparable with, the neolithic (Caton-Thompson & Gardner 1934, pp. 97-102, Mills 1979, pp. 169-74, Kromer 1978, see also e.g. von der Way & Schmidt 1985, pp. 281-9). The same basic point may also apply to the organizational skills used to construct the pyramids; these contrast with a lack of good evidence for extensive Old Kingdom irrigation works which has led some egyptologists to question the existence of artificial irrigation before the 1st intermediate period (Schenkel 1978, Endesfelder 1979). In this case I believe that an argument from silence has been pressed too far without taking into account decorum, which would disfavour the mention or display of such a 'mundane' activity.

There probably was irrigation, but its possible absence is symptomatic of the direction in which the ruling group directed expertise and innovation.

*The social context: theoretical issue,*

The evidence for centralization of the country and of wealth is supplied by archaeology. The development of writing is contemporary with that process and records and supplies detail for an ideology which fits well with it. The uniformity of the written record also parallels that of archaeology. In the presentation of ideology, the system of decorum excludes humanity from the focal context of royal-divine relations. The most it does is to show personified geographical units provisioning the king (Fakhry 1961, pp. 17–58), and, slightly more concretely, ‘human’ abstractions of agricultural estates bringing produce to the king and to members of the élite (Jacquet-Gordon 1962). This exclusion aptly heightens the material focus on the king and the élite, but because of the system’s specialized and ‘sacred’ character, it would be dangerous to press the point too far, if only because decorum appears to deprive the élite as well as the rest of mankind. Élite tombs could not depict the king or the gods. Instead, the gradually increasing decorative repertory shows the tomb owner among his or her kin, as well as inferiors or dependants who work in his or her service on the land, presenting produce, and engaged in subordinate administration. The figures are often named in captions, sometimes inscribed after the rest of the decoration was completed, but they may also be ‘genre’ figures, lacking a specific identity.

Such a presentation leaves out a great deal of reality and of society, and corresponds at a lower level to the appropriation of Egypt as a royal ‘estate’. It omits any concerns that might apply to the rest of society on its own terms and makes its members only slightly more visible than they are in the archaeological record of their activities on their own behalf. Late Old Kingdom biographies—from a time when there is far more evidence from provincial sites—exhibit the concern of the élite for the less fortunate (Roccati 1982), probably drawing on traditional oral sentiments of solidarity (for written material see Assmann 1983, p. 74), and thus soften the divisions of society, but they too cannot speak for the rest. Almost nothing allows a glimpse of the ideology of the non-élite, and there could possibly be different and opposing values held by them, although no period in Egyptian history provides strong evidence for counter-cultures. It is not necessary to believe that all those who built the pyramids, who probably included among them robbers of other tombs, thought they were doing themselves good. To assume that state-imposed burdens were universally accepted (e.g. Stadelmann 1985, p. 105) is to ignore the fact that this system did not endure and hence that some must have questioned them; but the initial stimulus to change will have come from within the élite who could seize the power to alter it, not from outside. Among the remainder, the archaeological record suggests that the acquiescent and the rebellious alike were materially and culturally impoverished by central appropriation, as in a sense were the élite. This degree of centralization and focus on a single person could not last.



Writing affected the non-élite directly through administration, but administrative writing is almost entirely lost, because it was on perishable media (for the earliest such papyri see Posener-Kriéger 1975); only the élite could afford writing on their monuments. The record of the population's integration into the state cannot be recovered, and it cannot be known what proportion of them was touched by central exactions of labour. Even if this gap were filled to some extent, it would not present the administered on their own terms, and the indications are that the 'texts' would be lists and accounts, not complex records including decisions or ideas and reflections on decisions. The existence of such material would not counterbalance the presentation of subordinates in élite tombs.

### Conclusion

Writing appeared after state formation in Egypt. From its invention until the notation of texts, its relationship with the state was passive or interactive: it aided centralization and was expanded, through central decision rather than evolution, to contribute more to the same process and perhaps to help in specific aspects of administration. But when texts came to be recorded, writing acquired extra potential that could not be so well controlled, rather as the contemporaneous extremes of centralization could not be maintained. Because of its restricted potential, ultra-limited literacy and a writing system restricted to notations could serve its masters fairly faithfully, while limited literacy poses more problems—if only within the literate élite, since there is no evidence for wider dissemination of its message or for writing-related conflict (which does not mean that the latter did not occur). Limited literacy may have had more political than cognitive implications, but in any case an understanding of its effects must involve many other factors. State formation and structure, which differed so much between Mesopotamia and Egypt, and the survival of the state, remain central to the analysis both of writing and of the archaeological record: the symbolic system of the state provides the context for interpreting both symbolic and material records (which are themselves also symbolic). The exclusive identification of state, kingship, and ideology in Egypt, and the love of monuments, gave a major rôle to an additional and potent use of writing in permanent display. This is an important source in its own right, but in so far as it adds evidence for another field of enquiry, that field is history rather than archaeology.

In other respects, archaeological material and writing, its distribution and its absences, are parallel sets of evidence. In its 'interactive' relationship with the state, writing intensified the material deprivation of most of society, so that it must be drawn into archaeological models. It is also valuable for archaeology as a stimulus. Preserved writing is a tiny, skewed sample of what there was, and any consideration of its position in society must turn on the analysis of gaps, both in writing and in how writing reports on, and ultimately affects, unwritten communication. Thus, in the construction of hypotheses about the nature of the sample, interpretation of writing shares a basic procedure with archaeology. I have used written and depicted material together with an archaeological analogy (Nubia) and environmental considerations (the alluvium

and relations between cemeteries and settlement) to suggest an interpretation in which writing points to gaps in the archaeological record, such as provincial sites, while archaeological material—which the pyramids are—provides the framework. Archaeology and writing complement each other's silences.

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*Power and authority in Early Historic  
Scotland: Pictish symbol stones and other  
documents*

STEPHEN T.DRISCOLL

During the early Middle Ages the north British people known as the Picts erected hundreds of carved stone monuments mostly in what is now eastern and northern Scotland. These sculpted stones are the most complex surviving expressions of a people who, although possessing only a rudimentary literacy, were nonetheless developing the social and political institutions of a medieval state. In this chapter I will offer an interpretation of these monuments, which links them with this developing social complexity and exposes aspects of this historical process which may not be discovered in the surviving documentary record. In so doing I hope to suggest some of the potential that these artefacts offer for the writing of history.

**Historical synopsis**

The documented history of the native peoples of northern Britain begins with the Roman military campaigns of Agricola, but it is not until half a millennium later that texts from native hands survive. The Agricolan campaigns of the late 1st century AD were intended to expand the Roman province of Britannia northwards and, like later efforts, they were a failure in that no civil administration was ever established among the Iron Age peoples of northern Britain. The only direct contacts between the northern barbarians and the Empire were the short episodes of surveillance when the linear frontiers of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall were occupied, which were separated by occasional punitive expeditions (cf. Breeze & Dobson 1978, Hanson & Maxwell 1983). These ancestors of the Picts, who in the account of the Agricolan campaigns are styled 'the most northern dwellers upon earth, the last of the free' (Tacitus 1970, p. 30), remained always beyond the Imperial boundaries.

Living on the periphery of a great empire, there was of course some commercial contact, which is represented by the small quantities of Roman goods which are found on native sites (Robertson 1970). The nature of this contact is unclear, but to judge from the quantities of goods it was far less intensive than the contemporary relations across the German frontier (Hedeger 1979, Pearson 1984, pp. 81–6). As a result the most significant legacies of the Roman world were not visible, material changes, but the more elusive ideological changes associated with the practice of Christianity. Clearly the Picts were not converted by the Roman army, but just how and when



Christianity was adopted by the Picts are difficult questions, answers to which are hinted at in the symbol stones, as we will see.

Beginning with the classical geographers and continuing with the early medieval writers, we may distinguish the presence of at least four different cultural groups who by AD 600 coexisted within the boundaries of modern Scotland. The *Gw•ry Gogledd*, men of the north, who occupied most of southern Scotland up to the Forth-Clyde isthmus, were linguistically and socially related to the southern British Celts who eventually came to be known as Welsh. During the 6th century control of some of the British territory on the east coast was lost to Anglian immigrants from the continent. North of the derelict Antonine Wall were found the Picts and Scots. The Scots of Dal Riada claimed an Irish ancestry and maintained strong linguistic, political, and dynastic links with their cousins in north-east Ireland. The Picts seem to have occupied all of the region north of the Forth with the exception of the Scottic portion of the western highlands and islands (see Fig 13.1). Despite various attempts at conquest, these peoples all maintained separate political identities until the mid-9th century. At that point it was possible to distinguish an AngloSaxon kingdom of Northumbria extending virtually from the Humber to the Forth; a British kingdom of Strathclyde centred at Dumbarton, near modern Glasgow; the Scottic kingdom of Dal Riada occupying the Inner Hebrides and adjacent coastal areas; and Pictland whose political geography is more obscure. Containing as it does vast tracts of mountainous country and remote islands, it is inconceivable that Pictland formed a single political or even cultural unit. Minimally we must accept Bede's division into northern and southern provinces (*HE* 1968, III, 4), but this is probably an oversimplification. Since some areas were too remote for any central government to control until the 18th century we should imagine a number of independent petty kingdoms in the highlands which on occasion fell under the dominion of the more powerful kingdoms of the fertile coastal regions. Traditionally the origins of the medieval kingdom of Scotland has been identified with the conquest of the southern Pictish kingdom by the Scottish king Cinaed Mac Ailpín (Kenneth Mac Alpin) and the subsequent union of the two realms in the mid 9th century. But regardless of how politically astute we imagine Kenneth to have been, he cannot be credited with the entire creative act of making a kingdom. Indeed the sudden appearance of a kingdom possessing the apparatus of a state, albeit in rudimentary form, poses something of a problem for the medieval historian. A.M.M.Duncan, an authority on Scottish history, has summarized the historians' view of the problem as follows (1975, p. 110):

The kings of Scotia and of Scotland stamped unity upon the four or five disparate peoples north of the Tweed and Solway; yet the precocity of a single kingdom of Scotia or Alba in the mid-ninth century... seems to excite little comment.... The only Celtic realm with well formed and independent political institutions at the beginning of the 'high middle ages' was that with apparently, the smallest cultural heritage, Scotland.

Not only is there little comment about Scottish precocity, there are few contemporary notices of any sort concerning the crucial formative years of the

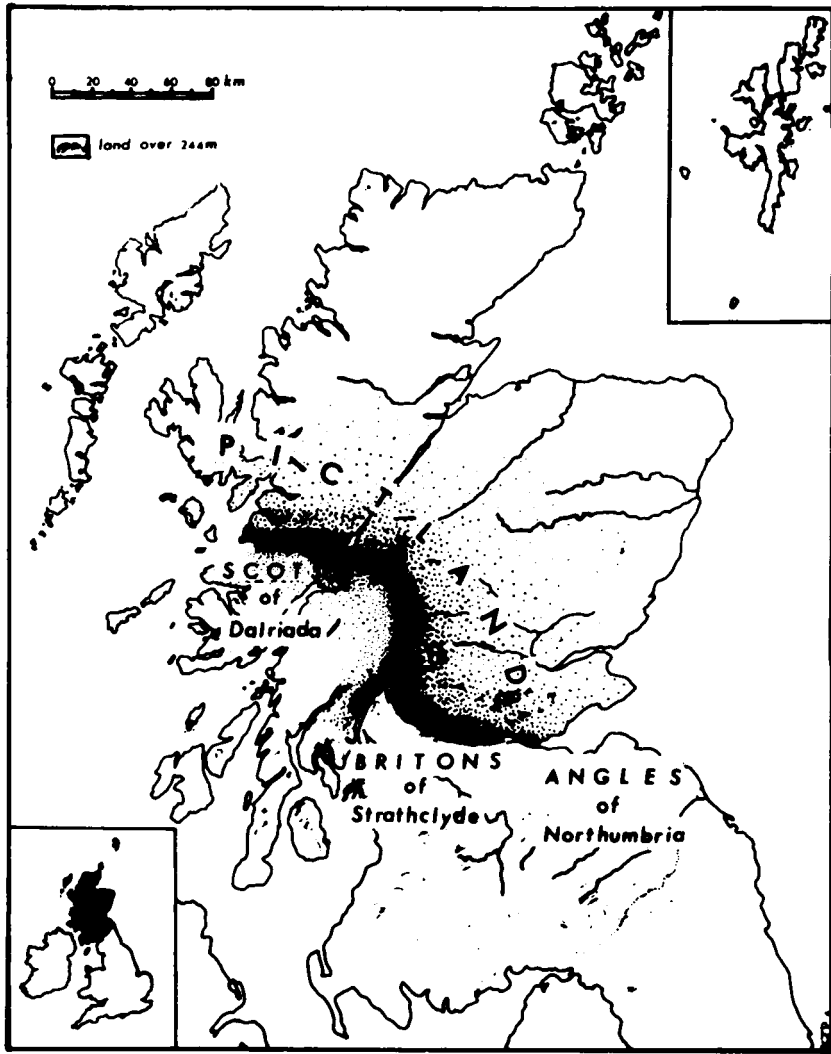


Figure 13.1 Political map of north Britain AD 600.

late 8th to 10th centuries. This poverty of documents is so acute that no competent historian pretends to be able to construct the sort of detailed narrative account wherein the creation of the kingdom can be seen as the work of gifted individuals whose motives may be analysed: they can barely keep track of the names of the rulers. Because of their self-imposed confinement to the documentary portion of the material record, historians are forced to rework the few scraps of dynastic history, and these are often culled from foreign sources: Irish annals and Anglo-

Saxon texts (cf. Anderson 1980, 1982, Smyth 1984). Because the documents will not support an explanation of political evolution in terms of internal social dynamics the tendency has been in the purely textual studies to look to external stimuli, and to credit the impact of Viking raids in the early 9th century and the subsequent settlement with bringing the Scottish state into existence, just as Roman intervention is held to have consolidated the Picts originally. In fact, the origins of the Scottish state are to be found in the institutions which appear to develop in Pictland well before the earliest Viking raids.

I believe that the symbol stones provide the missing native perspective needed to understand the construction of the kingdom in terms of the indigenous development of new institutions and social positions. In what follows I present the outline of an argument which allows the stones a central rôle in the formation of the Pictish kingdom, that kingdom which eventually came to form the core of the Scottish state. To do this I treat the symbol stones as statements which bear witness to some of the radical transitions in Pictish social and cultural history; not the least of which was the political centralization leading to the emergence of the Pictish kingdom. The study of such cultural transformations generally falls under the rubric of state formation.

### **Pictish state formation: administration and discourse**

I do not wish to enter into a detailed discussion of the general properties of state societies or of the mechanisms leading to the formation of states: these are issues too involved to grapple with here. Recent discussions of these matters (e.g. Cohen & Service 1978, Jones & Kautz 1981) illustrate both the range of scholarly opinion on the topic—from environmental determinism through various manifestations of systems theory to purely ideological explanations while at the same time making the particular point that each society has a unique historic trajectory, a trajectory which is likely to deviate from all generalized models of state formation. Nonetheless, Runciman identified a few very general features that are characteristic of state societies (1982) and which are of some use: first, that control of economic resources will be centralized in the hands of an élite minority; second, that military of coercive force will be likewise centrally controlled; third, that administrative institutions provide the most unambiguous indication of a state organization.

For the case of Pictland, I propose to associate the development of a royal administration and an increasingly visible, self-aware aristocracy with the invention and control of a standardized symbolic system. The origins and arcane meanings of the animals, fantastic beasts, and abstract designs which constitute the Pictish symbols are obscure (see [Fig. 13.2](#)): there is no Pictish Rosetta stone. We know that they were executed with great consistency following a uniform syntax over areas far larger than the limits of any single Pictish polity and that they were executed in a variety of media, but most often they survive today as monumental stone sculpture (Stevenson 1955). To discover some of the social importance of these symbols I have regarded them in their various contexts as playing active rôles in mediating social relations. In so doing I have found it instructive to follow John Barrett's (1988) suggestions for reconstituting

past social relations through the archaeological analysis of the fields of discourse in which material objects are employed. Considering symbol stones as elements of discourse is merely to recognize that social actors employ a range of non-verbal expressions to negotiate their daily lives, as has been well documented for clothing (e.g. Hebdige 1979) and folk housing (Glassie 1975, 1982) to cite only two non-verbal media. I have made the further connection between the propagation of these symbols and their changing use over time with the birth and maturation of the southern Pictish kingdom for two reasons. First, the phenomena of the symbols and the growth of the kingdom appear to be synchronous in so far as our documentary and artefactual materials may be compared. Second, I assume that such a symbolic system would be under the control of a political and/or religious élite by virtue of their superior access to material and cultural resources, and that they would employ it to promote and secure their authority. Thus we might expect the dominant group to articulate through the symbol system their version of the social order to secure its reproduction. This was surely the case with the analogous technology of early medieval power, writing, the use of which was deliberately restricted to élite groups and to topics of theology, cosmology, property, law, genealogy, and history. Implicit in this formulation is the assertion that the development of the symbols and the Pictish monarchy are inseparable facets of the same process of social and political evolution. Before, however, we can turn to consider the rôle of the symbols, we must first review the documentary evidence for the development of Pictish royal institutions and their implications in terms of state formation.

It is possible to identify some of the structural characteristics of states in the contemporary documentary evidence concerning the southern Pictish kingdom, but for the most part such references are too brief and too infrequent to be analysed in depth. For instance, in the annals there are numerous references to military campaigns and there can be little doubt that the Picts did field formidable armies (cf. Anderson 1922, Anderson 1980), but the organization and composition of such groups are not revealed in the annals. We may infer that, like their neighbouring Celts, the Irish and British, whose heroic literature has survived, Pictish armies were composed of aristocratic warriors in the retinue of their lord. Our knowledge of economic and administrative affairs is likewise restricted to what may be gleaned from words or phrases. The most interesting annalistic note referring to an administrative office occurs in 729 when some of King Nechtan's men are described as *exactatores*, a term which strongly suggests some tax-collecting capacity, and in the words of Wendy Davies that the 'Pictish kings were developing some real machinery of government' (1984, p. 70). Further evidence of economic and administrative organization must be inferred from documents which post-date the Pictish period by some centuries. Barrow has noticed in the early Scottish charters of the 11th and 12th centuries, traditional forms of tenurial obligations which he interprets as evidence of well established estates going back into the Pictish period (1973, pp. 7–68). He has further suggested that the well known pit- place-names (from *pett* meaning portion or share) refer to portions of these estates. Even more interesting, however, is the suggestion that these estates were organized into a system of pre-feudal shires administered by thanes. That is to say that by the mid-9th century, and possibly as early as the 7th, there existed royal officials

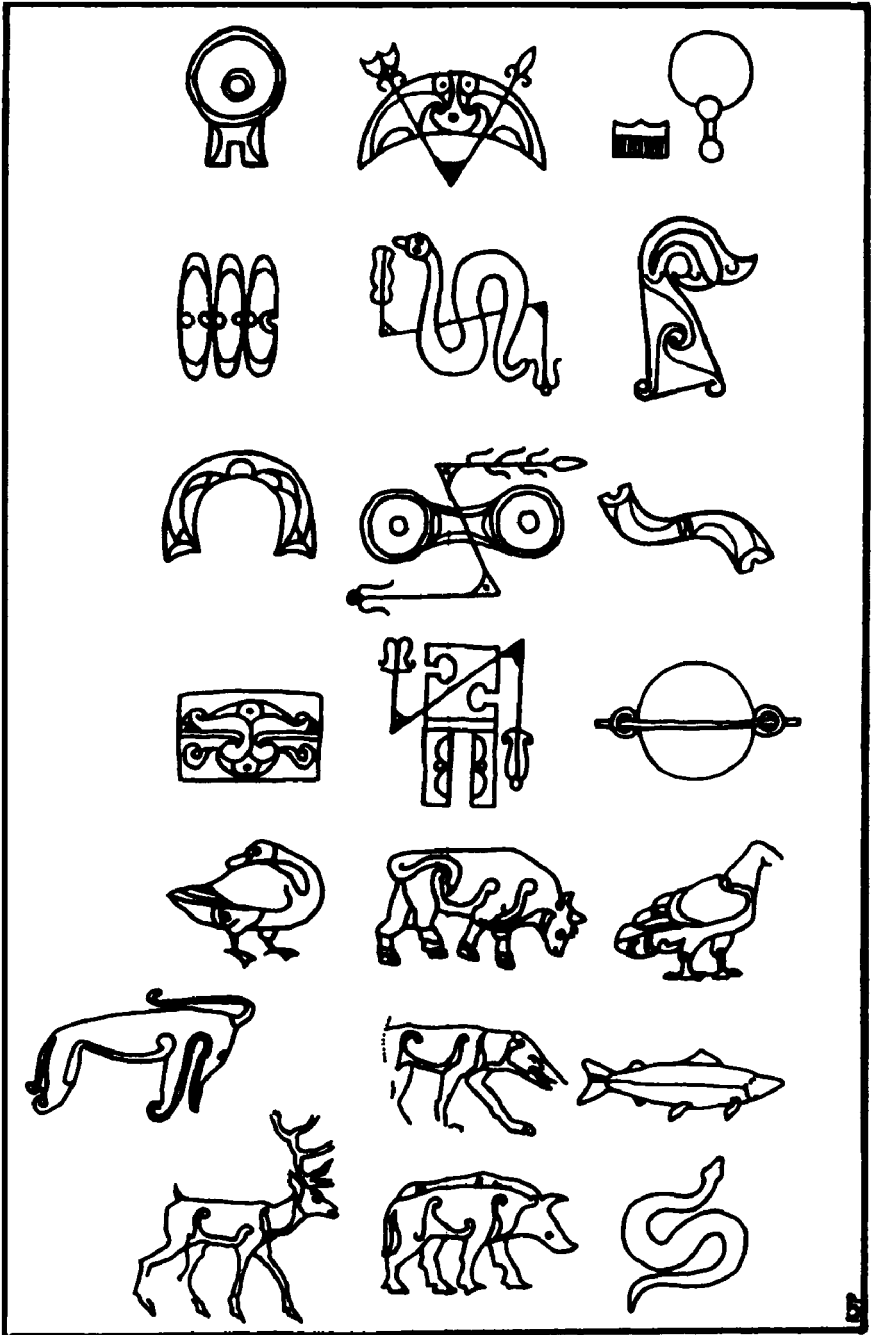


Figure 13.2 Some of the more common Pictish symbols as found on the class I stones.

(thanes) to oversee the most valuable economic resource, agriculturally productive land. It seems to be possible to distinguish two levels of royal administration: thanes or *moirs* who were directly concerned with control of agricultural production on royal estates and regional governors, represented by the *mormaer*, 'great steward'. By the 10th century annalistic sources give us evidence of the existence of this higher stratum of royal officials, mormaers or great stewards, but to judge from the available references to their actions in annalistic sources these great stewards may be regarded as a Pictish innovation of some antiquity (Jackson 1972, pp. 102–10, Duncan, p. 110). *Mormaers* apparently governed quite large regions, not just estates but whole straths. They seem to have exercised military duties as well as looking after the king's fiscal interests. Thus is our evidence that economic and military resources were being administered by office holders who were responsible to the crown.

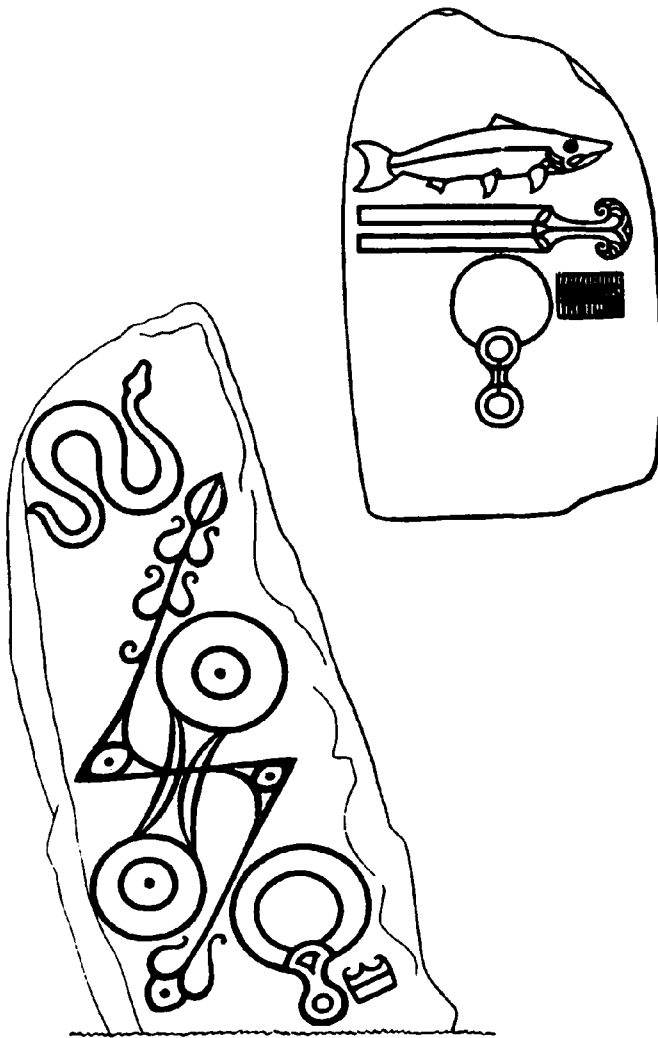
There are parallel developments in Scottish ecclesiastical organization, which again point to Pictish structures pre-dating the 9th century *adventus Scottorum* (see Anderson 1982). Donaldson's examination of the documentary evidence for bishops before the reign of David I (1124–53) revealed the existence of a diocesan church organization with sees at St Andrews, Dunblane, Dunkeld, and Brechin, all of which are in southern Pictland (1953). He concluded that this form of hierarchical church organization owed little to Irish or Columban monasticism and had developed from an earlier British Church. This is after all what Bede tells us (*HE* 1968, III, 4) and is what late medieval hagiographic traditions of east and central Scotland would lead us to believe (MacQueen 1981). This is not the place to explore the origins of the Pictish church, but it seems to have grown out of a seed planted by Romano-British Christianity (cf. Thomas 1971, 1981), albeit one which took some centuries to mature. Thus we should imagine that the conversion of the Picts was part of a more general north British pattern of culture change, which saw the eclectic adoption of certain (perhaps imperfectly understood) aspects of 'Roman' culture. The conversion process, when better understood, may come to be seen as typical of the cultural transformations brought about by contact between imperial or commercial empires and peripheral peoples. Such changes often include the creation of new religions shaped from a blend of traditional beliefs with indigenous interpretations of foreign beliefs. In cases where the new religion assumes a messianic character and becomes politically potent, the phenomenon has been termed a *revitalization movement* (Wallace 1966). We have no way of knowing if messianic qualities were prominent in the Pictish formulation of Christianity, but such a religious response would not be out of character amongst people aware of the material splendour of the Roman Empire, but living at the limits of its direct cultural impact. Of course, elsewhere in Celtic Britain the evidence for this acculturation extends beyond religion and includes the adoption of elements of Roman material culture (Alcock 1971) and the practice of using imperial terminology to glorify titles, place-names and personal names (cf. Campbell 1979). Pictish acquaintance with literacy must date to this conversion, but we are not in the position to study these cultural transformations from texts any more than we are able to understand their changing attitude to the Church other than through the medium of the symbol stones.

In these isolated particles of information we may discern the distinguishing characteristics, which Runciman has described as the necessary preconditions for statehood; these are the hallmarks of a rudimentary state or, as the political anthropologists would have it, a proto-state. Thus we observe in the invention of the specialized governing positions of *mormaer*, thane, and *exactatores* the crucial development stage, the 'emancipation from real or fictive kinship as the basis of relations between the occupants of governmental roles and those who they govern' (Runciman 1982, p. 351). None of the documentary sources can, however, inform us of the means by which these social institutions were installed or how they developed. This to a large measure is because the Picts did not appreciate writing as an important expressive medium; another more potent symbolic system was used for authoritative statements.

### Pictish symbol stones and symbolic discourse

Writing and Christianity are inseparably linked in the barbarian west including the Celtic west. It is therefore surprising that so little evidence of Pictish writing exists, despite the probable 7th century origins of the conversion. Kathleen Hughes in an essay entitled 'Where are the writings of early Scotland?' was 'driven to conclude that there had been little written history and written literature in early Scotland and that history was mainly oral' (1980, p. 17); *a fortiori* for Pictland. There exists only one manuscript which *may* be ascribed to Pictland, the *Book of Deer*, and that is regarded by Hughes as reflecting a low standard of scholarship (1980, pp. 22–37). Moreover out of the 42 known Pictish inscriptions, 32 are in an indecipherable ogham script (Jackson 1984, p. 182; Okasha 1985). We can only assume that the reason for preferring a pictographic system was that the symbols more closely reflected traditional knowledge. In all Celtic societies, Picts included, was found an aristocratic group which controlled the religious and mythical lore of the community as well as historical and genealogical knowledge, and it seems most likely that it was they who developed the symbols. The native inventiveness of the symbols should not disguise their close technical relationship with writing. The two media share the capacity to fix statements in place and time, which has the effect of making them less open to revision and dispute. Because of the intimate link with the church, the written word also naturally was endowed with sacred, mystical overtones. Clanchy (1979) has described how writing among largely illiterate medieval societies provided a means of asserting authority, which was virtually immune from scrutiny by all but a select few. And, while I do not wish to overload this analogy between writing and Pictish symbols, I am inclined to believe that the inspiration for the graphic display of symbols was first encountered in texts and inscriptions and that complete knowledge of its use was similarly restricted to a specialist élite. These formal similarities become even more apparent when we observe the two types of symbols are found in socially analogous contexts.

The best known displays of Pictish symbols occur carved on boulders and stone cross-slabs; and when taken together with the distribution and the pit place names



**Figure 13.3** Two well preserved examples of class I stones with paired symbols followed by the mirror and comb symbol, a typical mortuary syntax. The Aberlemno roadside stone (left) stands 1.9 m, the Dunrobin Museum stone (right) is 1.0 m tall. Illustrations after Allen & Anderson (1903).

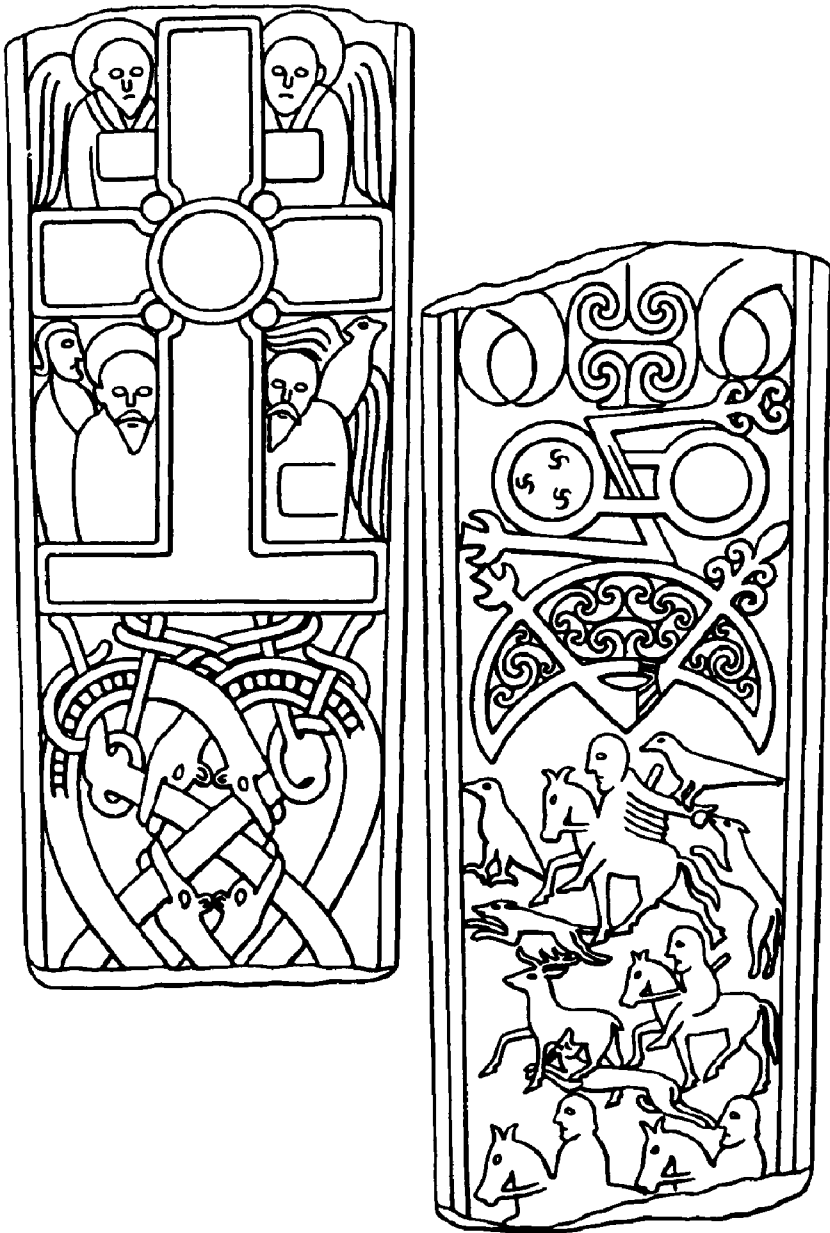
they provide the best indication of the territorial extent of Pictish hegemony. The corpus of symbols contains over 30 elements, the most common of which are illustrated in [Figure 13.2](#). The classificatory scheme devised at the turn of the century and still accepted is, in rough chronological order, as follows:



- (a) class I stones are rough, unshaped slabs and boulders bearing a combination of two or more symbols (see Fig. 13.3),
- (b) class II are dressed stone slabs bearing a cross and symbols (see Fig. 13.4), and
- (c) class III are sculpted stone crosses lacking any symbols but on stylistic grounds are dated to the early medieval era (Allen & Anderson 1903).

Although, as we will see, these classes mask both functional distinctions and chronological overlap, it is the most convenient system currently available. The points generally made about the Pictish sculptural tradition focus on the vitality of the design, the skill of execution and the prominence of nonecclesiastical themes, which include both secular figures and what are presumably mythical, perhaps pagan, beasts. These monuments are located predominantly in rich agricultural regions and the artistic skills are taken as indicative of generous patronage. Modern scholarship has focused on questions of dating and upon art-historical problems of the origins and inspiration of specific motifs (cf. Curle 1940, Stevenson 1955, Henderson 1967, pp. 104–60, 1978, 1982). To date no universally accepted dating scheme has been developed (Stevenson 1959, pp. 33, 54–5), nor have the art-historical studies revealed much of the social meaning latent in the symbols but for a critique of some recent interpretations see Driscoll 1985. Previous proposals include interpreting the symbols as clan insignia, labels of professional status, élite titles, territorial signposts, totemic figures, records of marriage alliances, or simply as mystical religious symbols. All these previous suggestions share a similar theoretical weakness in their failure to allow the symbols an active rôle in social discourse leading to the emergence of a state. In order to apprehend the social significance of the symbols, the often neglected information about the range of contexts in which the symbols are found must be drawn into the discussion. These archaeological associations should help us to appreciate some of the implicit meanings embodied in the symbols, although we remain ignorant of their precise significance.

We may discriminate between different fields of discourse on the basis of archaeological context and in terms of the syntax governing the arrangement of symbols (cf. Barrett 1988). In recent years it has become possible to state with increasing confidence that some of the class I stones are markers for inhumation burials under round or square cairns (Close-Brooks 1984). The practice of raising a memorial stone over a grave is paralleled in contemporary Wales and Ireland, where large groups of early Christian inscribed grave stones have been recorded (Nash-Williams 1950, Macalister 1945). It is to this funerary context that the bulk of class I stones, those bearing paired symbols or paired symbols plus the mirror and comb symbol, should be assigned. There is another less well defined and generally under-valued group of stone monuments, which do not conform syntactically to funerary monuments; they occur in a variety of locations: incised on stone slabs, carved into living rock faces and scratched on cave walls. For want of a more precise term I will label these ceremonial contexts, although I recognize they do not form a coherent group. Some of these, most notably the bull figures from Burghead and East Lomond, which may be linked with fertility, are distinguished from the funerary monuments syntactically,



**Figure 13.4** This partially damaged class II monument from Elgin Cathedral now stands 2.15 m. Figures of evangelists and angels (wearing book satchels around their necks) surround the cross. On the reverse a hunting scene is subordinate to the Pictish symbols. Illustration after Allen & Anderson (1903).

in not being paired with other symbols, and contextually, in having been found near fortified enclosures containing ritual features which appear to have been centres of regional importance. Likewise the two known carvings on living rock-faces are associated with fortified strongholds and are found outside Pictland (Radford 1953).

Similar to the ceremonial group in being eclectic and in deviating from the funerary syntax are occasional portable objects bearing symbols. Most of these seem to be fairly immediate, quick and sloppy scratchings into stone or bone. Among this group are a jet pendant (also bearing a crucifix), a whetsone, and a few possible gaming pieces, but most are of unknown function. Better known are the finely crafted objects of silver and bronze bearing symbols, which include different types of jewellery as well as ornaments of unknown function. Among the jewellery are examples of heavy silver chains and delicate cloak pins (known as hand-pins) which are distinctive elements of aristocratic attire. The engraved symbols are small adornments to standard designs and are not prominent, being visible only at close quarters. One has the impression that the symbols were directed at the wearer and his or her intimates, possibly as a reminder of the origin of the object or the status of the wearer. There can be little doubt that in this context the production and use of the symbols is firmly in the hands of the aristocracy, both lay and religious, who after all will have controlled the production of such goods. Scholarly opinion on the function of the other symbol-bearing metalwork objects varies widely, but it seems clear that they were not items of apparel. Some of these are laurel leaf plaques which have been plausibly interpreted as a type of votive object of late Roman inspiration (Laing & Laing 1984, pp. 263–4). The association in the Norrie's Law hoard of symbol-bearing plaques with a symbol-bearing handpin, places them in an aristocratic milieu and further suggests that the ritual use of the symbols was likewise in aristocratic hands including those of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

This versatility of the Pictish symbols, which enabled them to be employed in a range of social contexts, is not generally appreciated but does have important implications for interpreting their social significance. First, the exact meanings of the symbols must vary with the context as is so well illustrated by Deetz's comparison between the semantic value of candle sticks found in church and those found in one's home (1977, p. 51). Secondly, and more importantly, the ability to regulate the use of the symbols appears to vary from context to context. While anyone might scratch a symbol into a scrap of bone, the exclusive presence of symbols on precious metal jewellery and ritual paraphernalia suggests that public display of the symbols was restricted to aristocratic circles. So while we remain as ignorant as ever of the precise content of the symbolic expressions found in these special contexts, we can apply these suggestions about élite control of symbol use to interpret the more common monumental contexts. With this knowledge it becomes possible to develop interpretations of the mortuary symbol stones as evidence of the social change engendered by the process of state formation.

### Monumental symbols

In order to grasp the social significance of the class I mortuary monuments it is helpful to consider them as statements within a discourse which expands from the ritual context of burial to acquire additional meanings over time and which involves different segments of the community, not simply the family of the deceased. The most compelling evidence for burial associations comes from the north (Close-Brooks 1984), but southern Pictland also has funerary contexts (Stevenson 1959). This may have implications for regional political development, but for the moment let us consider a simple, generalized situation.

Death produces social chaos by removing an actor from the network of social relations. Funerary rites exist to resolve this disorder by responding in culturally specific ways to particular spiritual, emotional, and social demands (Huntingdon & Metcalf 1979). While not wishing to suggest that spiritual and emotional needs are insignificant, here we are concerned primarily with the question of social reproduction. Remembering that the dead do not bury themselves, monuments erected in memorial to the dead say as much about the aspirations and intentions of the living as the status of the dead. We may also note that an elaborate burial monument suggests that the person or persons responsible for its construction are concerned to display not only their relationship to the deceased but also their control of material and cultural resources. In the cases of the new social institutions introduced by the Pictish state, such a display might be expected by an heir whose position was not firmly established or was radically new and in need of some ideological reinforcement.

Initially the symbol stone operates in a field of discourse composed of the heirs, more distant kin including possible contenders and other interested members of the community. The statement is simple: by honouring the dead and by extension the deceased's social position the successor to the deceased and the heirs' supporters demonstrate both their sincerity and legitimacy. The monument establishes a permanent personal link between the heirs and the new ancestor, which is further strengthened by the deployment of symbols appropriate for the adornment of aristocrats and conduct of rituals. Incidentally, such a connection may support the frequently aired suggestion that some of the symbols carry genealogical meanings. Thus the heirs combine four different sources of legitimacy in a single act of raising a monument:

- (a) the supernatural, through the dead and the ancestors;
- (b) propriety of rank claimed through descent;
- (c) ideological sanction represented by the control of arcane signs; and
- (d) *de facto* right represented by the control of material resources and skilled labour needed to erect the monument.

The stones fix individuals in place and time, making their existence and the claim of inheritance less dependent on memory, so in a limited sense the stone acts like an early charter by recording a property transaction in a way that is available for later reference, with the help of witnesses (see Clanchy 1979 on the mechanics of

early English charters). Of course the stones lack the precision of documents, but instances of monuments concerned with the transfer of property and position, sometimes bearing arcane symbolism, are not hard to parallel in Early Medieval Europe.

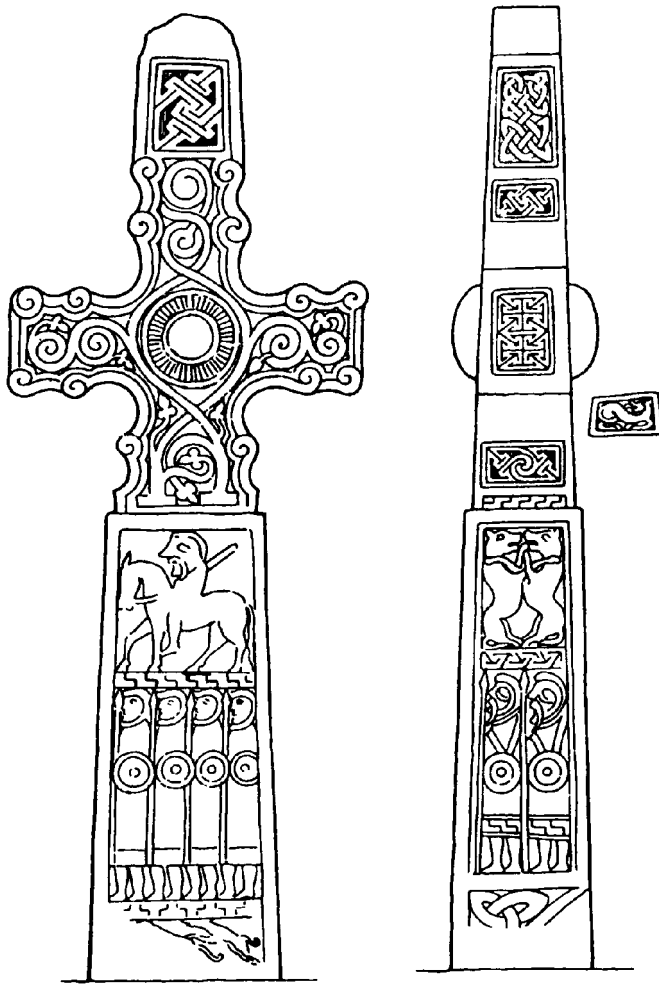
In Early Christian Ireland, Mac Niocaill notes that '...the use of written evidence in matters of title to land, for example, stands in direct line of descent from *ogam isin gallan*, the ogham inscription on the standing stone, used as evidence of a boundary line' (1984, p. 153) and thus postulates a precise connection between Irish funerary monuments and property transmission. This connection apparently stems from the legal importance of the burial mounds in the marking of property boundaries and the maintenance of hereditary property claims. Commenting on early Irish property law and the inscribed memorials, Charles-Edwards states that 'the inscriptions over the graves have the same role in showing title to land as charters or other deeds in a more literate age' (1976, p. 85). Similarly, but lacking monumental inscriptions, AngloSaxon barrows, are associated with property divisions (Goodier 1984) and I would suggest property transmission. Few of the scholars working on these materials have attempted to relate the phenomenon of burial monuments explicitly to political circumstances and social development. Thus the most compelling parallel for interpreting the Pictish symbol stones comes from Denmark, where Klaus Randsborg argues that the occurrence of Danish Rune stones 'appears to be connected with the emergence of new social categories ...where the monuments should sustain the position of the successors of the deceased' (1980, p. 25). The new social positions to which he refers are those of the royal officials who appeared during the development of the Danish kingdom in the 9th century. In Denmark the stones are mostly found away from the heart of the kingdom, in the periphery where royal authority was most tentative. In Pictland most of the class I stones are found in the north, far away from the core of the southern Pictish kingdom, which suggests that Isabel Henderson's argument (1958) for a northern origin centre for the stones might make more sense turned on its head, with the finely executed stones representing an 8th-9th century effort to bring the north under southern rule, rather than an early, undebased artistic tradition originating in the north. These cross-cultural comparisons should not be pressed too far, since there is no way of telling whether the stones were erected by the principal heir or collectively by the surviving kin, or indeed whether the succession issues addressed by the Pictish stones concerned simply land tenure or also included positions as royal officials.

Class I mortuary monuments, I believe, represent the use of a new mode of discourse to support the establishment of new social positions within an expanding royal administrative structure. Such statements as are recorded on the monuments may have served to pre-empt claims traditionally defined by kinship in favour of clientage-defined positions, or simply to restate these claims in the face of changing political circumstances. The vocabulary of this discourse, I have tried to indicate, was drawn from a symbol system generated from traditional knowledge in conjunction with some experience of literacy. The effect was to create a discourse which was at once mystical and authoritative, aristocratic and political. The identification of these genealogical and political themes helps to explain why some of the symbols were maintained when

the locus of the discourse shifted from the class I mortuary monuments to the class II cross-slabs.

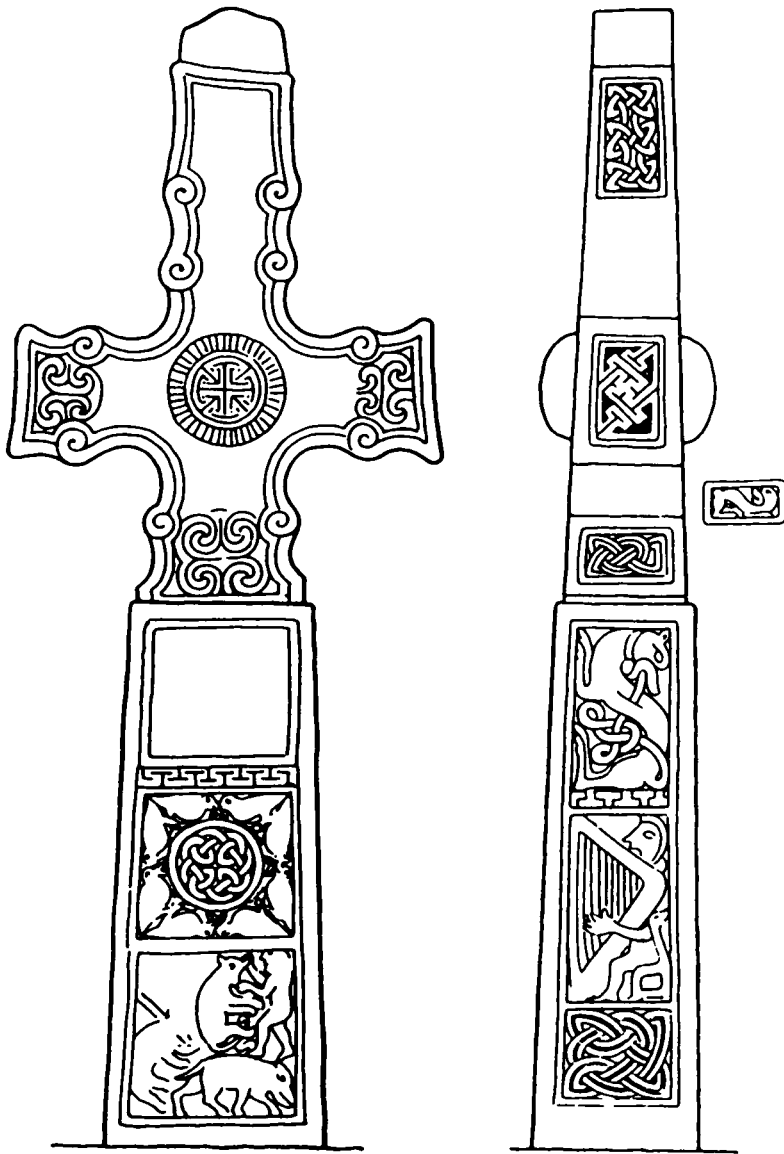
Class II monuments are cross-slabs bearing a relief representation of a cross on one side, usually with figure representations on the reverse. The symbols may be found on either or both sides, but usually on the reverse. They are more elaborately decorated than class I stones; such elaboration shows strong stylistic links with the decorative arts of Northumbria and Ireland. They are more commonly found in southern Pictland than in the north. The class II cross-slabs introduce Christian symbolism into the discourse of carved stone monuments, while keeping them separate from some of the expressions by expanding the medium to two sides. The cross itself, like other Pictish symbols, is an abstract, non-representational design, which embodies numerous meanings, and which likewise requires interpretation. In addition, class II stones introduce an air of the cosmopolitan via the use of decorative styles no longer exclusively Pictish, and by incorporating the universally recognised symbol of the crucifixion. There is no evidence to suggest that class II crosses are funerary monuments, nor can they be explained away as evidence of newly converted pagans hedging their bets. I think they mark the point at which the royal administrative system has been established and the Church has become a political arena where power disputes are contested through the patronage of religious establishments. The prominence of the symbols of Christianity on Class II stones emphasises the adoption of a more powerful discourse, one capable of banishing the animal symbols with their possible regional or pagan associations, one which was supported by a highly centralized, hierarchical, transcendent institution. The church as an example of institutional organization or application of power served as a model for expansion without regard for temporal or spatial boundaries. Moreover, once installed upon the church's monuments, the symbols became integrated within a regular ritual cycle, which gave the messages controlled, repeated exposure, in contrast to the unpredictable and disruptive association of the class I stones with death. The figures often depict the aristocracy engaged in a variety of worldly activities, like hunting (see Fig. 13.4), or arrayed in military gear. Such illustrations link their activities and attire to the cosmic order and serve to legitimize the social order as well as contributing to its maintenance. The Pictish symbols are less prominent now than before and perhaps have been co-opted and transformed from their original meaning into evocations of authority through past tradition. Clearly the potency of the expressions carved on class II slabs derive from the cross-slabs as foci of worship, the place at which the Picts encountered God or His saintly representatives. The sheer monumentality of these crosses would have been a reminder of the relationship between those who could commission such things (presumably those aristocrats portrayed on the cross), and the cosmic order symbolized by the cross.

Finally, in the class III stones, the old symbols find no place on the three-dimensional free-standing cross and cross-slabs. On the free-standing crosses the figural representations are completely subordinated to the symbol of Christianity. While in class II the human representations were more or less independent of the cross, since the two images could not be viewed simultaneously, in the free-standing representations people are confined within decorative panels which are ordered



**Figures 13.5 and 13.6** The free-standing class III cross at Dupplin stands 2.65 m. On the shaft are pannels of warriors, beasts, a harpist and a possible hunting scene. The decoration of the cross head includes patterns which recall ornamental metalwork and illuminated manuscripts. Illustrations after Allen & Anderson (1903).

according to the form and decorative inspiration of the cross. Unfortunately these are more fragile monuments and most are represented only by fragments; the Dupplin cross (Figs. 13.5 & 13.6) is a rare exception. The regional distinctiveness of classes I and II have given way to a variation of Insular art, which implies not so much a loss of identity, as an expansion of horizon and a suppression of the local Pictish interests represented by the symbols. The emergence of class III is frequently linked with the accession of the Dalriadic dynasty of Cinaed Mac Ailpín (Stevenson 1955, pp. 122–8, Anderson 1982, pp. 126–32); surely this is a significant political development, and not simply for its contribution to the art history of sculptured crosses. What little we



know of the later 9th and 10th centuries suggests that it was a period of relative stability (Duncan 1975, pp. 90–7), one which saw the establishment of an increasingly powerful Scottish aristocracy.

Because the symbols are banished and the ‘secular’ imagery is tightly controlled, it could be thought that class III stones are expressions devoted to the spiritual, void of



political significance. The Church was, of course, far from politically neutral; it had interests to protect and patrons to support (Davies 1982, Smyth 1984, pp. 112–15, 131–40, Nieke & Duncan 1988). This is perhaps best expressed in the decorative style found on both Class II and III crosses, which clearly mimics fine metal-working techniques of the sort adorning both aristocrats and altars (Henderson 1967, pp. 133–4). Thus the authority of the church as observable in material displays of wealth was unified with that of the élite, and this visual similarity reminds us that the clergy were aristocrats whose interest were those of the dominant social group. So class III stones, far from expressing the independence of the church from worldly concerns, enshrined the ornate material symbols of prestige and status that the élite drew upon and thereby legitimized them.

Any sketch of the dynamic potential of Pictish stones is bound to be unsatisfactory. However, my aim has been to introduce the concept of discourse as means of restoring a political meaning to these monuments. Their prominence and durability are forceful expressions of aristocratic power and are adequate indices of the resources available to those in authority for use in social discourse. The formal development of the monuments tells us that the discursive practices were changing over time, as theoretically they should and as we know historically they did. The astonishing variations within types tells us that the makers and their patrons were drawing upon their knowledge of the symbols and stylistic conventions as their needs dictated, thus underscoring the idea that social reproduction is a constantly developing practice undertaken by knowledgeable social actors.

### Acknowledgements

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*Literacy and power: the introduction and use  
of writing in Early Historic Scotland*

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The major impetus for the introduction and use of written modes of communication in Scotland in the period between AD 500 and 900 can be related to the establishment of Christianity, in particular the establishment of the Iona monastery on the periphery of the kingdom of Dalriada, by Columba in the mid-6th century. While maintaining a monopoly over their unique literate skills, the early ecclesiastics were able to impress an idea of the value of documents on the secular authorities, and hence we see the early kings beginning to use these written artefacts to further their own political ends and aspirations.

All of this was occurring at a time when the kings were also developing new means of administering their kingdom, and were increasing their control over the production, distribution, and use of a range of high-quality objects and imported goods. In so doing the kings were deliberately drawing upon, and manipulating a wide variety of resources to legitimize their own power and position within society. A measure of the success of these actions can be seen in the events of the mid-9th century when the Scots of Dalriada under their king Cinaed Mac Ailpín (Kenneth Mac Ailpín) were able to take over neighbouring Pictland, thus creating a territorial unit which was to form the core of the medieval kingdom of Scotland (Fig. 14.1).

This chapter considers the manner in which writing was introduced into Dalriada, the relationship between the religious authorities who controlled the technology of writing and the secular authorities who were beginning to exploit it, and the manner in which royal power and control was exercised through documents. Inherent in this approach will be the view that documents should not be seen as distinct from, or indeed as having primacy over, the other artefact forms more traditionally studied by archaeologists. Instead it must be accepted that both are expressive media active in the formulation and negotiation of a wide spectrum of human social relations. Discussion of the concept of documents as artefacts need not concern us in detail here as it has been dealt with elsewhere (Driscoll 1984, in press, Barrett 1981), except to emphasize the important contribution to this archaeological debate offered by Clanchy. In his work on the introduction of documentation into England in the immediate post-Norman period (1979) it is evident that the earliest documents do indeed fall into the realms of a material culture, and were being manipulated and used alongside and frequently appended to a variety of other artefacts. It then took a period of around 200 years for the potency of writing to become understood and accepted in a form our contemporary literate mentality would readily recognize. Clanchy eloquently makes

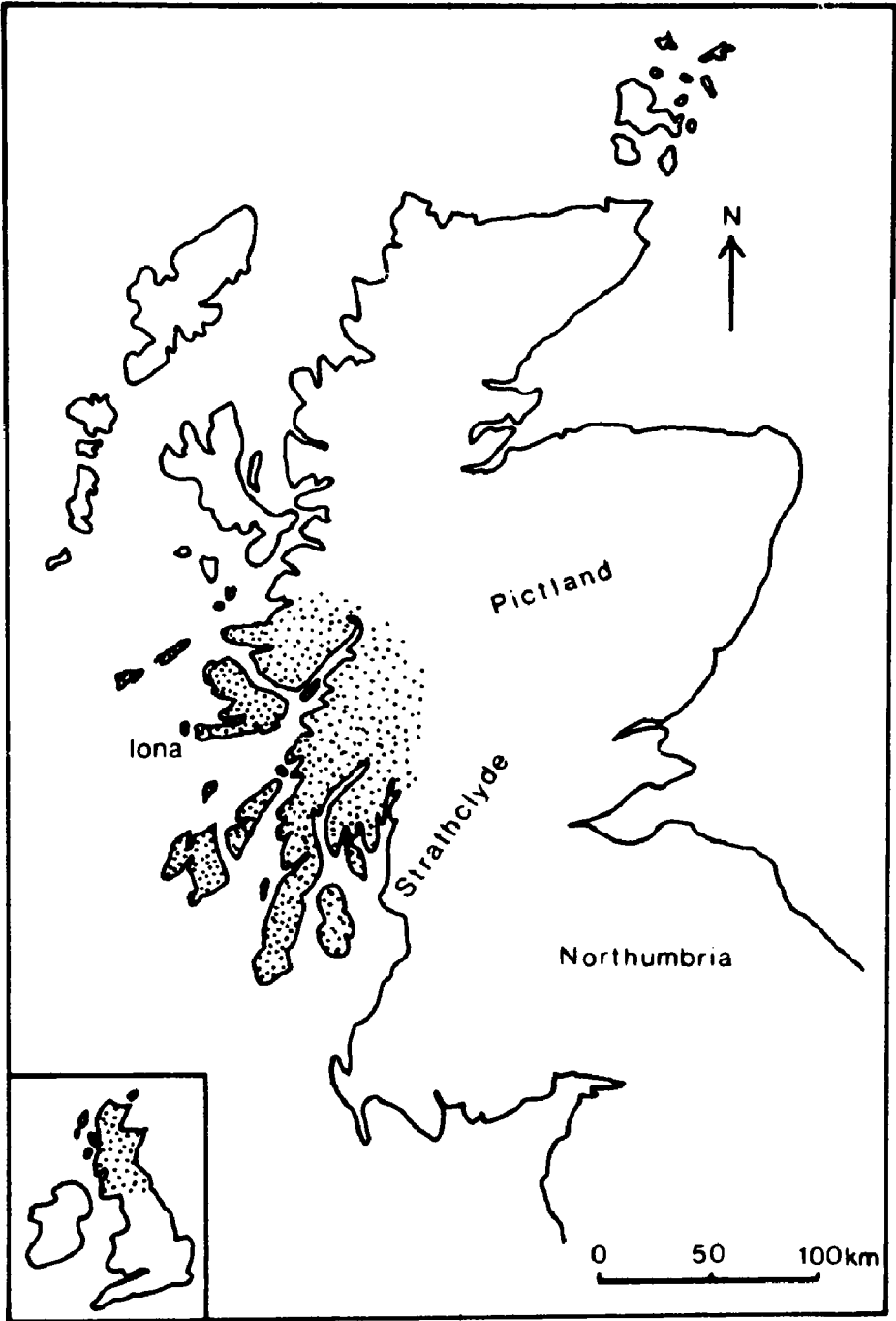


Figure 14.1 Dalriada and the other major Early Historic kingdoms of Scotland.

the point that our primary concern in approaching early documents must not aim simply to cull that information contained within them considered of relevance to study of sites and other material objects; rather we must examine the processes which led to their original compilation and then their subsequent survival within the wider archaeological record. This perspective on the introduction of writing must receive some emphasis since it is one that many historians and historical archaeologists have failed to recognize.

The kingdom of Dalriada was one of a group of political entities to emerge in northern Britain after the collapse of Roman power and direction in the early 5th century (Fig. 14.1). Traditionally the kingdom is said to have been founded around AD 500 by Fergus Mór Mac Erc, from whom all the early kings were descended. The rulers of the kingdom were not native Britons, but came from north-east Ireland. This movement is best seen not as a mass folk migration, but as the transfer of a ruling dynasty who felt their political position and ambitions in Ireland under threat (Níeke 1984). Prior contacts with north Britain, and more specially with the area of Argyll in the west, provided the grounds for transfer to this particular area.

Around 50 years after the establishment of the kingdom of Dalriada another migration, this time of a group of ecclesiastics led by Columba, culminated in the founding of the monastery of Iona on the periphery, if not actually within the lands of Dalriada (Anderson & Anderson 1961). Presumably the Dalriadic dynasty had already come into contact with the well established post-Patrician church in Ireland, and once they migrated to Britain their new territories may have appeared an area ripe and ready for the expansive activities of this body.

Since Christianity was, from earliest times, a religion of the book, it was axiomatic that ecclesiastics should be adequately literate. This skill was devoted to the transmission of Christian knowledge through the analysis and copying of existing sacred texts, and indeed the compilation of new ones. The importance of these activities can be seen in the rapid emergence of the *scriptorium*, or writing office, as a major feature of the Iona monastery. This may have been producing its first documents within a couple of years of the monastic foundation (Duncan 1981). Indeed this *scriptorium* became, and indeed continued to be, one of the most celebrated features of the monastery throughout its existence. The stature of Iona as a centre for Christian learning may be judged from the range of texts the ninth abbot Adomnan (c. AD 628–704) could draw upon when writing his book on holy places (Meehan 1958). However, writing was not restricted solely to satisfying the everyday intellectual and religious needs of the community. Instead it was exploited to authorize the new religious orthodoxy within secular society in a variety of ways. For example, we frequently hear of ecclesiastics travelling around the countryside carrying with them books (cf. V.C. 11,9) which were necessary for the performance of Christian ceremonies. The importance attached to these volumes would have been evident to the illiterate native communities not least because of the highly skilled craftsmanship used to produce and decorate both the books themselves, but also the leather satchels within which they were carried. The other context in which these specialist skills were in evidence was in the realms of royal and other high-status activity. Here the equation between high-quality craft products and the power and authority needed to produce them emphasized



and impressed the importance of the ecclesiastics and the paraphernalia of the new religion on the secular community.

Adomnan recounts several miracles associated with books, particularly those of Columba (V.C. II, 9, 44). Such miracle stories were a frequent feature of early Christian hagiography, and in this instance they were being used to demonstrate the sacred and mystical quality of the books and the power and importance of the individuals who created, owned, and used them. In attributing magical qualities to their books, the ecclesiastics were probably merely adopting and Christianizing a long-standing pagan tradition of the use of magical artefacts in ritual practices. In this ritual use, and especially the miracle stories, we see the early Columban church deliberately demonstrating the select access to knowledge and thereby authority, afforded to it by the unique skills of literacy.

The task the ecclesiastics faced in impressing the importance of writing on the secular communities on north Britain was probably assisted by the previous perceptions the latter had of this form of communication. The use of writing had formed part of the ideology of *Romanitas* developed during the preceding centuries which assisted the authorization of Roman power in Britain. While on the fringes of the Empire, the natives of north Britain must have come into contact with writing, if only in the form of Latin inscriptions (to them unintelligible) found associated with the frontier forts. Many of these would have remained visible within the crumbling vestigial remains of these Roman sites, and would have provided support for folk memories which associated the use of this mode of communication with a form of imposed external authority. These folk memories may well have been revitalized and exploited by the early church. Certainly the ritual use of a foreign language, Latin, rather than the vernacular, must have helped define the distinct position and powers of the new religious authority.

To understand how the ecclesiastics established their new religion and their own position within a traditional pagan society, their relationship with contemporary secular authorities demands further consideration. In Dalriada this relationship is an interesting one, since the two groups were, initially at least, socially indistinguishable. This is a situation not restricted to Dalriada; however, what does appear specific to Dalriada is the manner in which the relationship between the two groups developed.

The social context of the activities of the earliest ecclesiastics may be reconstructed by reference to Early Historic Ireland, where Dalriadic Christianity had its origins. Here we find much evidence to support our view of the essential similarities between the early kings and ecclesiastics. During the conversion period, and indeed afterwards, many of the leading ecclesiastics were members of the major secular lineages, and in some cases were even contenders for royal office. The founding father of Iona, Columba, has been seen as the first of these aristocratic saints (Byrne 1965), being a leading member of the Irish Uí Néill dynasty. Thus it seems that Christianity provided a new outlet for the political ambitions and aspirations of members of leading secular dynasties. The similarity between the group does not end here, for once in office it is clear that Columba and many other ecclesiastics established dynasties which continued to control their monastic foundations for generations. These religious dynasties differed little from their secular counterparts; for example their patterns of succession

being determined by similar relations of kinship. In addition in creating these family institutions, the ecclesiastics began to mobilize the resources to which their high social position afforded them access to support and maintain their religious activities. Here we see the Early Historic church moving away from the vows of poverty and humility which characterized the earliest Christian missionaries. Instead we see the mobilization of rights to extensive lands and movable wealth to found many large monastic communities. Alongside this appropriation of material resources for the church we should set ecclesiastical intervention in other areas traditionally the concern of secular society. Davies, for example, has illustrated how the capacity of the kings as creators and enforcers of law was undermined by ecclesiastical insistence that many disputes be resolved by recourse to clerical decision rather than the normal secular procedure (1982a). Goody also demonstrates the increasing ecclesiastical concern with development of Christian concepts of the family, marriage, and patterns of inheritance (1983), all of which would formerly have been the concern of the kings in their rôle as lineage leaders. This intervention in issues of social structure and inheritance was, of course, largely motivated by the need the church had to acquire resources with which to support its own activities.

Set against this background the appearance and establishment of the Christian ecclesiastics must have posed a considerable threat to the power of the kings who now found themselves struggling to maintain an interest in both their properties and powers. In relation to Dalriada this threat may have been viewed as particularly acute for two main reasons. Firstly, the rise of the Uí Néill dynasty in Ireland seems to have been one of the factors precipitating the migration of the Dalriada to northern Britain. Thus the arrival of Columba, a leading member of this lineage, may have been viewed as a continuance of Uí Néill attempts to undermine the Dalriadic aristocracy. Secondly, the Dalriadic lineage was a comparative newcomer to the area, still working to establish its own position within the new territories.

While the potential for conflict between the early kings and ecclesiastics would appear to have been great, what surviving evidence we have portrays their relatively tolerant and peaceful coexistence. Exactly why this should have been the case remains obscure. It may have been due in some measure to the youth of both groups and their consequent lack of firmly established local support networks. Columba himself appears to have been closely involved in secular politics from the outset. In AD 574–5 he accompanied the Dalriadic king at the conference of Druim Cett in Ireland (Bannerman 1974). This meeting was called to discuss a variety of issues, not least of which was the question of the position of Irish Dalriada in relation to the Uí Néill and the Scottish Dalriada. Of immediate concern here was the questions of to whom the traditional rights of clientage and military service were due. Perhaps of more lasting significance was the rôle played by the Church in bolstering royal claims to office. Iona, along with Armagh in Ireland, helped to develop the concept of the divine right of kingship (Byrne 1973, p. 254). *Adomnan's life of Columba* (Anderson & Anderson 1961) provides details on this, telling how Columba was involved in the ordination of Aedán Mac Gabráin as king of Dalriada in AD 574. Of course this must be accepted with some caution since Adomnan is likely to have overstated his case in order to enhance the importance of the church of his time, the late 7th century. However, the

view of the importance of Iona is supported by other evidence, not least that it was considered a suitable haven for the Dalriadic exile of the Anglo-Saxons Oswald and Oswiu, both of whom were to return home to rule their native Northumbria.

The tolerant and even symbiotic relationship which apparently developed between kings and ecclesiastics within Dalriada can be seen to have had crucial importance for each group. Following the conversion of the kings, the church would have had some measure of royal sanction for its efforts to influence and convert other leading members of the Dalriadic aristocracy. This contact was of importance because, apart from anything else, these were the individuals who had access to wealth in the form of land and other material goods which could subsequently be bequeathed to the church as a pious act. The irony of the royal sanction of this contact was, of course, that ultimately the channelling of resources away from the lineage and into ecclesiastical hands must have seriously weakened the position of the secular lineage leaders.

A close relationship with the kings of Dalriada also assisted the church in establishing contacts with other leading dynasties of northern Britain and Ireland. The re-establishment of Christianity in Northumbria following the reversion to paganism which had followed the death of the first Christian king Edwin resulted in some measure from the contact Iona has established earlier with the new king Oswald. Of course external contacts were not dependent solely upon royal sanction support; it is evident that the Columban church established relationships throughout Britain and Ireland during the course of its own activities. For the secular rulers, conversion and close association with the church provided them with access to a new religious orthodoxy which was gaining widespread support elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. This new religion was also able, through writing and prayer, to provide new ways of sanctioning their power. In addition, this association also brought the kings in touch with the international contacts of the early church which may be observed in the material products of foreign commerce. We know that the early church had strong links with Gaul (James 1982), hence it would seem likely that the secular rulers established similar contact with the continent as a result of the activities of the early ecclesiastics. The prime example of this contact is wheel-thrown pottery, imported from Gaul, which is frequently found on high-status sites of this period (Alcock 1971, *in press*). In Dalriada this pottery has been found at the hillforts of Dunollie and Dunadd, both of which have documentary references which suggest that they were closely associated with the ruling Dalriadic dynasty (Alcock 1981), as well on other lesser defended sites which were probably inhabited by other members of the aristocracy. Alcock has pointed out that some of this pottery should perhaps be seen as an adjunct to trade in wine (1986). Both pottery and wine would have been used in the feasting rituals, which were such a prominent feature of Early Historic society, these being deliberately used by the kings to demonstrate their power, position, and largesse to immediate followers. The use of wheel-thrown pottery and wine in such activities is of particular interest because of its Roman overtones; this again illustrates the manner in which post-Roman leaders drew upon classical mores to demonstrate their own position in society. While the secular consumption of wine may have predated the ecclesiastical establishment, it would not seem unreasonable to suppose that it developed new meanings and associations as its rôle in Christian rituals became

apparent. It is within this context of a Romanized élite culture that the kings were able to draw upon the literate skills of the ecclesiastics, and use documents for their own benefit. Considered as a whole, the remarkable successes achieved by both the early kings and ecclesiastics must owe much to the close relationship which developed between them.

Having considered this background we can now turn to consider the developing use of writing in the secular world, and the uses to which this was being put. The surviving documents which directly concern secular society fall into three main groups:

- (a) historical annals,
- (b) genealogies and regnal lists,
- (c) civil survey.

Examples from all of these groups survive only as copies incorporated in later medieval manuscripts and compilations (Anderson 1922, Hughes 1972, Smith 1972, Bannerman 1974). Textual analysis reveals that the original date of composition falls within the period under consideration here. In the absence of evidence for any form of independent secular writing office it must be assumed that all of these were produced within monastic *scriptoria*.

In order to appreciate the significance of all these forms of document it is important to remember that literacy creates new systems of knowledge, particularly by its ability to store information in a semi-permanent form, in a manner impossible within an oral society. The various qualities and consequences of literacy have been analysed at greater length elsewhere (Goody & Watt 1963, Goody 1977, Clanchy 1970, 1979), and hence need not be reiterated here. Of course these qualities would have been most apparent to those closely involved in the creation and use of the documents, in this instance the ecclesiastics.

Of the three documentary forms, the rationale for producing the annals is the least understood. The practice of annal-writing in Europe appears to have begun with the entering of notes in the blank spaces of the Easter tables which every monastery or church of consequence had (Anderson 1980, p. 1). These tables were used to calculate the date of this movable feast. Analysis of the various sets of medieval Irish annals which have been preserved indicates that they derive from a single set. The amount of Scottish material preserved within this original compilation suggests that it was written in north Britain, with Iona being the most likely location for this activity (Smyth 1972, Bannerman 1974, Duncan 1981). Because of the not infrequent practice of making retrospective entries into these annal lists, the precise date at which their compilation began is difficult to ascertain. Duncan, however, would place it between AD 550 and 650 (1981). This compilation continued until the early 9th century when the monastery was disrupted by Viking attacks.

The earliest of these annals were written in Latin, but later vernacular Old Irish was increasingly used, although the reasons for this remain unclear. Written vernacular literature had existed in Ireland since the beginning of the 7th century, but its use for annalistic recording took time to develop. Thus vernacular annal writing began to be used by AD 820 at the latest (Dumville 1982). The earliest Iona annals written in Old

Irish are for the early 8th century, though of course we do not know if that was when they were first recorded.

These Scottish annals, along with information of more restricted ecclesiastical interest, record a variety of important secular events. These can be divided broadly into notices of the deaths of kings and other close members of the secular ruling lineages, and notices of military activities (Bannerman 1974). It is the information contained within these annals which has been culled by historians to create the main (but still sketchy) historical framework for the kingdom. Of particular interest for archaeologists are the references to military action, sieges, burnings, and the rebuilding at a number of named sites. When these places can be located on the ground they prove to be hillfort sites associated with the ruling lineages of the period (Alcock 1981). They include the forts of Dunollie and Dunadd to which reference has already been made.

The accuracy of this contemporary chronicle is assumed, but would be supported by the apparent close relationship which developed between the secular and religious authorities. The leading questions posed by these annals are why the church felt it necessary to incorporate references to these secular events within its own chronicles and what uses, if any, contemporary society made of these. Both questions raise issues historians appear reluctant to discuss. The least we can say is that the church clearly located its own calendar of activities within the broader spectrum of the activities of the higher echelons of secular society. The practice of making retrospective entries into the annals does hint that these chronicles had some rôle to play in the creation of contemporary views of the past, whoever these were produced for. One explanation of annal writing may be that the church was using them in some way to demonstrate the Christian concept of linear irreversible time, this being at odds with traditional concepts of cyclical time. While the liturgical tables to which they were appended were used to calculate the correct sequence and timing of a cyclical recurring calendar, the annals themselves could be used to create a view of the progressive nature of time. On this point we know that the early church drew heavily on the Old Testament to illustrate its concept of the linear advance of time which was to culminate in the coming of the Messiah (cf. Gurevich 1976). This forward-looking notion of time was of particular importance because of the offers of reward and punishment which it could be suggested to hold out to the individual.

Analysis of the second group of texts, the genealogies and regnal lists, provide us with a much clearer insight into the uses to which documents were being put. Several of these exist, the earliest being that contained within the *Senchus Fern Alban* or 'History of the Men of Scotland'. As we have it today this is a 10th century document, but the original compilation appears to date from the 7th century (Bannerman 1974). One of its components is a genealogy which lists the descendants of Fergus Mór Mac Erc, who allegedly founded the kingdom, down to the sixth generation. Other surviving lists, which concentrate more specifically on succession of kings, were all compiled in Latin and derive from a single example extant in Ireland in the 11th century (Anderson 1980, 44 ff.), but their contents indicate the existence of earlier lists now lost.

The support of claims to authority by the creation of a past suitable to the group's or individual's present aspirations has a lengthy history which transcends the

introduction of literacy. Such creations were certainly of importance during the Early Historic period since it is clear that kings required a suitable ancestry (Dumville 1977). Within the traditions of an oral society, though, suitable genealogies could be created with relative ease by deliberate manipulation of the evidence, since there was little or no way of externally validating whatever claims were made. This situation was transformed with the developing use of writing. Once recorded in a documentary form a genealogy could establish certain individuals and families as office-bearers much more firmly than had ever been the case before. The fabrication of claims to challenge the power and position of these individuals would then have necessitated access to those lists which did exist, as well as to the technology whereby alternative versions could be produced.

Of course the nuances of written genealogy would not have been immediately apparent to the contemporary non-literate secular authorities, hence this in itself does not totally explain their use. Again we must turn to the early church for an explanation of their initial adoption. As Dumville has pointed out (1977), there is evidence that early ecclesiastics felt such genealogies were important mirrors of a king's right to rule. Abbots and other leading church figures also used written genealogy to support their claims to office, and it appears likely that it was this which stimulated the secular adoption of such documents.

While considering the manner in which genealogies could contain fabricated claims to authority, that incorporated into the *Senchus Fern Alban* is worthy of further consideration. It introduces us to the concept of a tripartite division of Dalriada, each division supposedly held by the descendants of either Fergus Mór himself, or his brothers Oengus and Loairn. Closer investigation of this reveals that this is unlikely to have been the case. Instead it is best seen as a deliberate fabrication designed to justify the rule of a single king over the whole kingdom (Nieke 1984). The implication of this is that the Dalriadic newcomers were able to establish control over not one but three distinct groups of people. What we are seeing here is how the combination of Christianity and writing allowed the migrants to gain the upper hand over pre-existing local groups, who were then effectively written out of subsequent history. Again the ability of this new group to extend control over such a large territorial area and the various groups who already inhabited it is an important measure of its success.

In the same way that writing was being used to support claims to authority, so too it was being used to legitimize claims to various resources. The second part of the *Senchus Fer nAlban* presents a civil and military survey of the kingdom, which lists the number of houses in Dalriada, probably for tax purposes, as well as the size of an army and navy a king could expect to raise from the kingdom. This document is unique within the Celtic lands and must be treated with some caution, but various comments about it can be made. It is inconceivable that the kings needed such a list to remind them of what was their due, since these resources would have been clearly defined by traditional relationships of clientage and land tenure. Instead the survey is better seen as a deliberate attempt to authorize claims to taxation and military dues. In this it has certain similarities to the Anglo-Saxon document *The tribal hidage* which is probably a tribute list compiled for the Mercian kings in the late 7th century. This details the numbers of hides (a land unit equating with the lands of a single family and hence the

'house' of the *Senchus*) from which tribute could be levied throughout the extensive territories they claimed to control (Davies & Vierck 1974). Broadly speaking, the *Senchus* also has analogies with the Domesday survey in England, which could not have been up to date enough to have been of much use as an administrative tool, but remained a valuable symbol of Norman power.

That these resources could be quantified in this manner is of interest since it may hint at the existence of some form of administrative organization, perhaps a hierarchy of local officials who could monitor and assess a region's resources as well as motivating these whenever necessary. Such local officials would have been particularly necessary if, as seems likely, the kings were peripatetic (Nieke 1984, Nieke & Duncan in press). Administrators would have been required to curate the royal resources when the kings were not actually present in person. While there is no other documentary suggestion that such administrative officials existed within Dalriada, it would appear that taxgathering officials existed in neighbouring Pictland in the early 8th century (Davies 1984, Driscoll, Ch. 13, this volume). If this is indeed the case it would seem not unreasonable to suppose that the Dalriadic kings would also have used such officials to help them control their extensive territories.

The *Senchus* is also of importance because it is compiled in the vernacular rather than Latin. This may just be an accident of its compilation during a period when the use of the vernacular was being widely experimented with. Alternatively it may have been a conscious creation in the native language for specific reasons. Here we need to remind ourselves that the increasing use of the vernacular in a written form need not be a symptom of a growing and wider expansion of literacy amongst native communities, rather—as Wormald has pointed out (1977)—it merely allows works to be read to illiterates. This is of some importance for we are now seeing documents losing some of the magical qualities ascribed to their Latin predecessors and taking a step towards democratization, now being intelligible (albeit through the auspices of a reader) to the wider community.

In addition to the surviving documents discussed above it seems likely that writing was being put to a variety of other uses. Davies has recently argued for the existence of a charter tradition in the Celtic west which had previously been neither fully appreciated nor accepted (1982b). While none survives from Dalriada they are known to have existed in Ireland at this time, while we also have two examples from Pictland, all of which would lend support to the idea that they were being produced and used in Dalriada also. Such documents might be expected to have been connected with Iona and other of the Columban monasteries within Dalriada since, in Davies's arguments, this charter tradition is concerned primarily with land grants to the Church. The acquisition of such land and rights to land was, of course, an important concern of all large emergent religious communities. We also know, as was mentioned earlier, of religious involvement in the formulation of legal codes. One of Adomnan's most celebrated achievements was the formulation of the *Law of the Innocents* negotiated with the kings of Ireland, Scotland, and Pictland and promulgated at the Synod of Birr in Ireland in AD 697 (Anderson & Anderson 1961, p. 95). This was designed to protect women, children, and men in holy orders and religious communities against acts of

violence in war and peace. Various penalties for contravention of the law are cited, these being in part payable to Adomnan's community at Iona.

So far this chapter has concentrated upon the use of writing for the production of documents. Of course it was also used in other contexts. The best evidence for this survives as memorial inscriptions on tombstones which, with one exception, are concentrated within the monastic confines of Iona. These are of interest since the majority are in Old Irish rather than the Latin normally associated with Christian rituals. The inscriptions themselves are short and form adjuncts to the main sculptural decoration (usually a cross) on the stone slabs used. The formula used is generally *oroit* 'a prayer for...'. The use of the vernacular again indicates the rôle Iona had in the development of the written version of this language, and again demonstrates that the ecclesiastics placed themselves within the traditions of the wider secular society. Outside Iona the only other early Christian burials so far archaeologically visible are those marked by stone slabs bearing in the main variations on a simple longarmed cross. These are all anonymous, and, while obviously Christian, they make little pretension to locate the buried individual in time and space in the manner of more elaborate or detailed inscribed stones.

The only other evidence for the use of writing from Dalriada takes the form of a small stone disc found in excavations at Dunadd hillfort bearing the Latin inscription *I(N) NOMINE* (Christison 1905), the function of which is far from clear but which has obvious Christian connotations. Perhaps its significance lies in the magical religious qualities and the inscription gives to the artefact. As such it should be seen in the same light as a rotary quernstone from the site which also inexplicably bears a small, incised Christian cross on its upper surface.

To summarize the thesis outlined so far: writing was introduced into Dalriada by the early church and was manipulated to help establish its own position within a traditional pagan society. In so doing the church extended an awareness of the potential of literacy to the secular authorities of the kingdom who began to use documents to authorize their claims to power and position. The power of these documents, however, lay as much in their 'godly' nature and ecclesiastical connections as in any widespread acceptance of the primacy of written evidence, or understanding of the type of knowledge and 'proof' it created. This view is well supported by the work of Clanchy mentioned earlier, in which it is clear that within Norman England documents did not immediately inspire trust. This is best illustrated by charters recording land grants which were adjuncts to traditional symbols of conveyance and ownership, the latter frequently being physical objects such as knives and swords. In England written documentation did not achieve primary as legal evidence until the 12th or 13th centuries, and there is little reason to suggest that this was not also the case in Scotland.

The introduction and use of writing by the secular authorities should be seen as just one of a series of measures these early rulers were taking to strengthen their control over the kingdom. Here, of course, we must be cautious and avoid allowing our own literate bias to lead us to overemphasize the contemporary importance of the documents considered here. Broadly speaking we can compare the control being extended over a system of knowledge evident in the developing use of literacy and documents with the control over the production, distribution, and exchange of a variety of material goods.



I have argued elsewhere (Nieke 1984, Nieke & Duncan in press) that the kings of Dalriada probably instituted a peripatetic system of rule within their kingdom. This royal progress was designed to demonstrate royal control over the whole of their large and disparate territories. The centres visited seem to have been the strongholds frequently mentioned in the annals. The primary importance of these sites lies in their rôle as local tribute collection points where products of agricultural labour were collected for royal consumption. In addition, the kings deliberately fostered industrial production within these sites. Along with activities based upon raw materials of agricultural origin such as leatherworking (Duncan 1982), the kings also patronized specialized craftsmen there, in particular jewellers. In sponsoring this the kings were able to control both the skills of these craft-workers and the products of their labours. This control over the production of high-quality goods rather than over just their circulation is worthy of emphasis as it is a developing feature of the Early Historic period throughout Britain and Ireland. In addition, imported items such as wine, wheel-thrown pottery, and glass also appears to have been channelled through such sites.

Worthy of especial note because of its symbolic value was the control of the production and distribution of fine metalwork, particularly penannular brooches, at sites with royal associations. It has been argued elsewhere (Nieke 1985) that wearing these brooches signified high secular social position, the most elaborate and precious examples being directly associated with kings. In controlling the production of these artefacts the kings were also able to control the meanings and symbolism with which they were being associated. It seems that these brooches were deliberately adopted by the early church which was consciously taking over various elements of material culture to emphasize its own high position within society. In so doing they added a new Christian meaning to this secular status symbol. In the case of the brooches this would have been a relatively easy procedure since the high social position of leading ecclesiastics allowed them easy access to the material symbols appropriate to their aristocratic position. Thus it seems that the church was not averse to drawing on existing valued and sacred objects and the symbolism with which they were associated to justify its present position. The introduction and use of writing into the secular world is perhaps the reverse of what we see happening with the brooches. Artefacts and skills first developed in purely ecclesiastical contexts were being adopted and used within secular society.

To provide a broader perspective on the successes of both kings and ecclesiastics within Dalriada we can consider the situation in contemporary neighbouring kingdoms. Here we can begin with Pictland where neither Christianity nor the use of writing gained a strong foothold until a comparatively late date, despite the missionary activity directed there by Columba and his followers. Hughes has argued that the state of 7th century Pictland was conducive to the rapid spread of Christianity (1970), but it was not until at least the end of that century that the new religion really gained royal sanction and became well established. The precise reasons for this contrast are difficult to elucidate clearly, but it may reflect the strengths and cohesion of early Pictish society, and the ability of the rulers to maintain their position of authority irrespective of the new Christian innovations. Even when Christianity was established the Picts reacted to it in a quite different way from their Dalriadic neighbours (see Driscoll, Ch.

13, this volume), and seem to have exercised a much tighter control over the activities of the early ecclesiastics. By way of further contrast, the Pictish experience can be compared with that of Early Historic Ireland where it appears that the authority of many of the secular tribal leaders was eventually subsumed by the growth of ecclesiastical power and interests. This again reminds us how similar were the interests of the two institutions. In Ireland the power of the secular rulers, however, proved no match for that of the ecclesiastics, the latter effectively taking control of large areas of land and many clients, fostering craft production and trade in their religious centres, and even fielding armies to defend their interests and those of their allies (Hughes 1966), and thus essentially acting in the manner normally ascribed to secular rulers.

In conclusion we can see that the introduction of writing as a mode of communication in Early Historic Scotland did have a marked impact upon society. While we should be cautious in overemphasizing the importance of writing given the small number of documents which have survived, nonetheless it is clear that these were beginning to be used to effect transformations in patterns of inheritance, ownership and dues amongst the highest echelons of society. Of particular interest is the manner in which the early church controlled the technology of writing and extended its skills to the secular world, thereby strengthening its own position within society.

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## *Inventions of writing*

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When discussing the origin and history of writing it is often claimed that writing is intimately connected with power and the state. In this chapter I argue that modern inventions of writing in the colonial world, instead of being seen as mere recapitulations of the original inventions thousands of years ago, should rather be understood in terms of the colonial situations in which they have actually occurred. Before discussing particular cases a few words need to be said about the special power which writing is assumed to have in the eyes of the non-literate.

In the 19th century, the topos of the non-literature's awe of writing, which had often been remarked on since the time of Columbus, became incorporated into a proper theory about the magic of writing. After discussing this development in terms of a sociology of knowledge I show how the actual inventions of nonalphabetical systems of writing in modern colonial times can shed new light on the question of how writing is related to power, the state, and resistance.

### **Technology and magic**

Technology certainly played a major rôle in the conquest and discovery of the New World. Firearms, the compass, and writing were not only obviously indispensable as technologies, however, but sometimes as magic as well.<sup>1</sup> On his fourth voyage, Columbus got into trouble in Jamaica. The Indians there, angered by the pillaging of his sailors, refused to provide supplies. Columbus happened to know, from a book he had on board with him, that an eclipse of the moon was due, so he summoned the leading Indians and told them that God was angry with them, and that they would be punished with famine. The warning, he said, was to be the moon losing its light. As his prophecy was fulfilled, the Indians were so frightened that they gave to Columbus whatever he asked for (Equiano 1967). When John Smith, conqueror and discoverer of New England, was taken prisoner and led to chief Opechancanough, thinking that he was about to be killed, he 'presented him with a compasse diall, describing by my best meanes the vse thereof'. Opechancanough decided his prisoner must be an important shaman, and therefore spared his life (Hulme 1985, p. 20).

Olaudah Equiano, one of the earliest freed slaves to publish an autobiography, likewise tells us of his effective use of technology as magic when trying to get a critical situation under control. He even acknowledges his debt to Columbus:

I...thought of a stratagem to appease the riot. Recollecting a passage I had read in the life of Columbus when he was amongst the Indians in Mexico or Peru, where on some occasion he frightened them by telling them of certain events in the heavens, I had recourse to the same expedient, and it succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations. When I had formed my determination, I went in the midst of them, and, taking hold of the Governor, I pointed up to the heavens. I menaced him and the rest: I told them God lived there, and that he was angry with them, and they must not quarrel so; that they were all brothers, and if they did not leave off and go away quietly, I would take the book (pointing to the bible), read, and tell God to make them dead. This was something like magic. The clamor immediately ceased and I gave them some rum and a few other things, after which they went away peaceably (Equiano 1967, pp. 145–6).

Savage, oral, preliterate, primitive man according to many sources treats writing as magic. Equiano himself has described his own attempts at coming to terms with the secret:

I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading, and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books as I thought they did, and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I have often taken up a book and have talked to it and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me: and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent (Equiano 1967, p. 40).

This story recurs in other contemporary black slaves' autobiographies (e.g. Cugoana 1787). And Goody quotes it from Equiano with approval—and a rational explanation:

For non-literate cultures, in Ghana as elsewhere, the magic of the written word derived from its pragmatic value as a means of communication, from its association with a priesthood, and from the high prestige and technical achievements of the cultures of which it formed part (Goody 1968, p. 206, see also Harbsmeier 1985).

Lévy-Bruhl, in his *La mentalité primitive*, collected similar accounts from a large number of sources (1922, 424 ff.). He saw writing as analogous to firearms when describing native attempts to understand the phenomenon: 'For the savages, books and writing are no less an object of astonishment than firearms. But they are no more embarrassed than that they explain them for themselves. They see them at

once as an instrument of divination' (1922, p. 424). Lévy-Bruhl had little doubt, indeed, that 'natives' everywhere consider writing as something mysterious. Quoting at length from Livingstone's observations he concluded: 'Even when the native appears to have learnt what writing is, even if he can read and write, he never loses the feeling that a mystical force is at work' (1922, p. 430).

Equiano's story of his secret attempt to listen to his master's books is found time and again in the ethnographic literature:

A Bechuana one day asked what's that on the table there? When he was told that it was books, and that these books told news, he put one of the books to his ear, but being unable to hear any sound, he said: this book doesn't tell me anything, and put it back on the table saying: 'Might it be asleep?' (1967, p. 430).

'Oral' man's reactions to writing, his 'unspeakable shudder' (Tiemann 1941, p. 385), his awe, astonishment, and surprise (Dornseiff 1925, p. 1; Schmitt 1963, p. 2)<sup>2</sup> when confronted with 'speaking paper', 'talking leaves' (Schmitt 1963, p. 2) and 'mirrors of speech' (Lévy-Bruhl 1922, p. 427), is also reflected in the precautions he sometimes takes to deal with things written: another man from Bechuanaland is thus reported as saying: 'I will not carry letters any more. If this letter had talked to me on my way, I would have been so scared!' (Lévy-Bruhl 1922). Others pierce the paper with a spear to prevent it from doing any harm by suddenly speaking up (Lévy-Bruhl 1922).

From Australia to Africa native messengers have also experienced the magic of writing in a more direct way: notes containing a list of what they were meant to bring along are reported to have exposed them if they had used any items for themselves or stolen them, even though they took the precaution of hiding the letter under a stone so that it might not see what they took.<sup>3</sup> In his youth, Dualu Bukele, to whom we will return since it was he who invented the Vai script in the early 19th century, was treated harshly on account of such a discrepancy between the book and his words. And a native of northern Australia, according to Spencer

who had stolen some tobacco from a package with an accompanying letter was astonished that the white man was able to find him out in spite of the fact that he had hidden the letter in the trunk of a tree. He vented his wrath upon the letter by beating it furiously' (Gelb 1963, p. 232, Lévy-Bruhl 1922, pp. 431–2).

In a more dramatic form, the story of Bellerophon and King Proitos, reportedly the only episode explicitly mentioning writing in Homer, makes the same point: someone undesirable is sent on a journey to deliver a message. The message, of which the bearer is ignorant, instructs the recipient to kill the messenger.<sup>4</sup>

Here we see perhaps more clearly what the preceding stories about preliterate ways of dealing with the written word also tell us: the preliterate mind's awe of literacy, and



the primitive superstition which treats writing as magic art (Harris 1986, p. 15). The question is, however, whether all this really tells us more about a preliterate *mentalité primitive*, or rather about the literate (if perhaps also in some sense primitive) mentality of Homer (pace Parry/Lord), Christopher Columbus, John Smith, Olaudah Equiano, as well as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Wilhelm Wundt, Jack Goody, and their sources.

### Knowledge and power

Magic and superstition in connection with writing became a major concern of classical scholars, orientalists, and ethnologists alike around the beginning of this century. Wundt discussed it at length in the various editions of his ten-volume *Völkerpsychologie* (1910) as did Lévy-Bruhl in his *La mentalité primitive* (1922). From the 1920s onwards, in fact, a number of books were written about the subject. Mieses' *Die Gesetze der Schriftgeschichte Konfession und Schriji im Leben der Völker* came out in 1919, Dornseiff's *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* was first published in 1922 and in an enlarged edition in 1925, Tiemann published the most thorough study in his *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* in 1941, and Bertholet's *Die Macht der Schrift in Glauben und Aberglauben* appeared in 1949. At the same time, interest in the 'history of writing' took on almost monstrous proportions, especially in Germany.<sup>5</sup> This fascination with writing was intimately connected with the political issue of finding and legitimizing a genuinely German script, a trend which culminated with the career of runes and runology in the Third Reich (see Hunger 1984).

Whatever the reasons for this intense preoccupation with writing and the various forms of magic connected with it, there was apparently little doubt as to the purely rational character of writing and literacy themselves: the magical practices and beliefs almost universally associated with them were assumed to derive from something else: from a 'primitive mentality' and, more generally, a lack of knowledge of what writing is really about. The magic of writing, although reportedly found among the literate to much the same extent as among non-literates all over the world (e.g. Wundt 1910, p. 304),<sup>6</sup> is nevertheless an expression of the vain attempt to get used to, and understand, the real meaning of this essentially new<sup>7</sup> means of communication. Magic is for beginners, so to speak:

for the illiterate the art of writing easily stands out as an ominous mystery, and of these there always have been many in Greek and Roman antiquity. The general level of culture ('Bildung') was considerably lower than today, and therefore the beginning were not looked down upon as something obvious and natural. To many, writing was an important festive act (Dornseiff 1925, p. 1).

Writing and literacy themselves cannot therefore be blamed for whatever superstitious and magical uses they are put. The point is that it is because they are

'new' to begin with-and paradoxically continue to be so for most people that such 'misuse' takes place:

Writing being determined so much for us by rational objectives and logical procedures, could not possibly by itself have provided the foundations for the extensive and many-sided role it plays in the superstition of all ages and people (Tiemann 1941, p. 294).

In other words it is not writing itself, but its absence, and the fact that it is 'new', that its use perhaps is still restricted to a few, and that it is not fully understood and developed, that explains its ubiquitous superstitious and magical quality. Writing itself thus creates not only two kinds of people, i.e. those who do and those who do not make use of it, but also a specific relationship between these two groups: the one by definition conceiving as magic what the other considers as technology. What the Western world sees as the rational use of writing is seen as magic from the point of view of the non-literate or preliterate, while their view and use of writing is necessarily seen as magical from our rational point of view. Technology and technological development are thus apparently intrinsically social: not only do they define and imply different groups according to whether such groups have access to this technology or not, but they also entail a situation of asymmetrical mutual misunderstanding between these two groups. Moreover, this relationship has a built-in temporal dimension of development and rationalization: the power of technology being based on its being perceived as magic by itself creates an important condition for replacing magic by technology.

Bellerophon was meant to die because of his ignorance of writing. Knowledge of his fate is a way of acknowledging a magical power in writing by claiming that it only hurts those who are ignorant of its merely technological power and use. Thus it is not writing itself, but rather the knowledge of writing, the knowledge of its double nature as both technology (for us) and magic (for them), that constitutes a power relationship between 'us' and 'them.' What we assume to be technology, by virtue of its magical power for 'them', in fact becomes more than just technology: it becomes itself a means of domination and control.

The authors of all the many books about the history of writing, and about the various forms of magic and superstition connected with the written word, had no interest in analysing the mechanisms of domination and control inherent in writing, or rather the knowledge of writing. Their admiration of writing and literacy as technology, as well as the corresponding fascination with its value as magic for others, served instead as an effective means of obscuring such relationships.

Their analyses of the relationships between writing, magic and technology can, however, also shed new light on some of the important practical and political aspects of the colonial situations in which writing and literacy confronted other modes of communication in many parts of the world, if we look at them in a different way. Neat distinctions between the functions of writing as a mere means of communication as opposed to ritual and magical use and misuse, and obsessive attempts to disentangle the secular from the religious functions of literacy, can also be seen as a systematic

attempt to redefine the colonial situation, the relationships between 'us' and 'them'—making literacy and writing themselves rather than the Book and the Bible into the cornerstone of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Turning the idolatrous heathen into a superstitious native means that quite different methods and technologies of analysis and description, as well as of domination and control, come into play. The trick by which Columbus, John Smith, Olaudah Equiano, and others made technologies produce marvellous results through their being seen as magic by their adversaries was, so to speak, transformed into a systematic theory legitimizing colonial practice. This transformation was also an expression of a change in the colonial situation itself: with colonialism and imperialism proper, secular agencies took over some of the functions which formerly only the church and the missionaries had performed.

More or less systematic applications of this theory thus predated their systematization in the early 20th century. Christian missionaries in many parts of the world have long known how to take advantage of the fact that literacy and writing, including whatever prestige they were assumed to have in themselves, could often be made almost synonymous with Christianity and the Book. No wonder, then, that Lévy-Bruhl could quote a number of preliterate heathen natives to exactly this effect:

We say: he who converts to Christianity is learning to read (in order to be able to follow the Christian rules and to understand the holy books). The native says on the contrary: he who learns to read is converting to Christianity. In fact, by abandoning his bones in favor of books, he ceases to address himself to invisible powers, to the ancestors, whom he has previously consulted and prayed to. But he assumes that reading will give him revelations of the same kind, emanating from superior powers, and consequently making him more secure, offering more effective protection.... Learning to read for him therefore is tantamount to changing religion (Lévy-Bruhl 1922, p. 426).

According to Maurice Leenhardt, in New Caledonia '“receiving the gospels” in the Caledonian language is rendered as “learning to write”' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1922, p. 432).

There is, therefore, more than one sense in which the native equation of writing with magic is true. Answering a missionary who questioned his use of divinatory bones, a man from Transvaal replied: 'For us, this is our book; you are reading the Bible all day, and you believe in it; we are reading ours' (Lévy-Bruhl 1922, p. 425). Among the Barotse one finds a similar evaluation: 'the only difference', they think, 'between their lequalo and ours, is that ours is a confused amount of black signs on paper, whereas theirs surely is more reasonable since it consists of solid matter' (Lévy-Bruhl 1922).

And Evans Pritchard was later to repeat much the same story in his study of *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*:

Azande often say: 'The poison oracle does not err, it is our paper. What your paper is to you, the poison oracle is to us', for they see in the art of writing the source of a European's knowledge, accuracy, memory of events, and predictions of the future (1937, p. 263).

Lévy-Bruhl, Evans Pritchard, and presumably most of their readers took these and similar statements by their informants as evidence for how we should imagine oral, savage, primitive, non-literate man thought about literacy and writing. If these statements made any sense, however, not only to us but also to those who allegedly uttered them, the distinctions between magic and technology, between writing and the Book, between literacy and belief or religion, must be assumed to be made by both quoting and quoted, observer and observed, native and colonial, non-literate and literate. The non-literate, in other words, needs to be basically 'literate' already, in the sense of being able to distinguish between function and meaning, writing and Holy Writ, in order to be able to compare his magic, divination, and bones, his superstition and religion, with ours, with our writing and paper, Bible and books. It is no coincidence that precisely the same claim that there is a universal distinction between magic and science, the secular and the sacred, the pragmatic and the extraordinary, played such a central rôle for those whom we today consider to be the founding fathers of anthropological and ethnographic realism, for example Malinowski and Durkheim. They too mostly dealt with primitive, savage, heathen people who by then were civilized and pacified enough to know, and to admit, that their ways were not the only ones. As a rule, the missionaries had already been there for quite a while to teach them so. The anthropologists came afterwards.

So far I have concentrated on the colonial situation in which what 'oral' man has been quoted as thinking of writing and literacy can be assumed to have made sense to him, as well as to those quoting him and to their readers. In what follows I try to show how this same situation might be a better explanation of various native inventions of non-alphabetical scripts in the 19th and 20th centuries in colonial Africa, North America, and Siberia, than are the accounts of these inventions in the discourses on the history of writing referred to above.

### **Recapitulations**

Most of the books devoted to the history of writing (e.g. Jensen 1925, Gaur 1984) do mention, at least in passing, what they tend to see as a fascinating, if curious, chapter of that history: the scripts invented, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, by certain 'primitive people' of Africa, America, and certain parts of Asia. For the most part these tales of invention were taken as welcome additional proof of what are assumed to be the basic mechanisms in the development from picture writing to writing proper or phonetic writing. Gelb, for instance, is particularly frank about his reasons for collecting these stories:

The writings developed among primitives under the influence of white men have passed, within the span of one or two generations, through a process of evolution which had taken thousands of years for writing in general to pass. Thus, we can observe the process of evolution speeded up immensely under the impact of foreign stimulus (1963, pp. 210–11).

Dalby, the most recent scholar to study particularly the West African inventions of writing, likewise deems his material to be of general palaeographic interest:

In addition to their interest for Africanists, the West African scripts have a wider paleographic interest, since they provide us with modern examples of the development of writing, spanning the whole range of graphic symbols from pictograms to alphabetic characters and diacritics (1967, p. 2).

Until very recently, there has been little doubt that the alphabet was the highest and most developed form of script imaginable.<sup>8</sup> Starting out from the assumption that writing is first of all a means of reproducing spoken language, and that alphabetical writing moreover is the most accurate way in writing to reproduce the spoken sound, almost all the existing histories of writing elaborate upon a ready-made hierarchical scheme. In this scheme 'development' and 'phonetization' have led humanity from fumbling beginnings with pictures and symbols to pictographic and ideographic scripts in the first place, and from there, following the path of increasing phonetization, first to syllabic writing and finally to alphabetical writing proper, where one has to distinguish once more between a less developed form with no signs for vowels, and the alphabet proper.

Seen from such a perspective, the inventions of writing by 'modern primitives' are fascinating indeed for students of the early history of writing. To the Orientalist, whose knowledge of the original inventions of various scripts, apart from myth and folklore, has to be based on the remains of the results of these inventions alone, it has been a special relief and attraction to be able to follow in detail, step by step, how these writing systems developed: in most cases the inventor was known by name and the invention could be dated. And the often well documented successive stages of the development of the script from pictographic signs to logographic writing and, through increasing phonetization, to syllabic writing (in most cases finally superseded by the Roman alphabet), simply repeated, microcosmically and in the span of one or two generations, the history of writing at large.

Friedrich was the first to discuss modern inventions of writing systematically and from a comparative point of view (Friedrich 1938). Arguing that ancient, no less than modern, inventions of writing were due to the model and influence of other existing scripts, he formulated, on the basis of his knowledge of contemporary inventions, a general rule or law for the invention of scripts. This 'law' is in itself a marvellously precise statement of the ethnocentrism or logocentrism underlying not simply his own variety of the history of writing: the amount of influence and inspiration from more advanced systems of writing is directly proportional to the degree of technical perfection, but inversely proportional to the degree of the inventions' originality (1938,

p. 185). Even Schmitt, whose thorough study of the invention and development of the Alaska syllabary (1951)<sup>9</sup> was the first monograph to deal at length with one of the modern inventions of writing, considered his research to be a contribution to a better understanding of the history of writing proper, i.e. the one going back over thousands of years to the real beginnings.

In other words, inventions of writing by living 'primitives' were first dismissed as secondary and dependent developments directly inspired by existing, more advanced, systems of writing. Friedrich and Schmitt, as also most later historians of writing, took them seriously, but only as microcosmic 'recapitulations' of the original, macrocosmically decisive, successive inventions of the various increasingly advanced ways of representing language by graphic signs. 'Recapitulationism'<sup>10</sup> in this, as well as in many other fields, means a reductionist view of contextual specificity: telling the stories of modern inventions as if they were microcosmic copies of some less well known ancient original is tantamount to forgetting about the specific context, the colonial situation, the rôle of church, missionary, and secular authorities in these processes. What follows is a first attempt to tell these stories once more, but this time taking account of the contextual frameworks of which the various histories of writing were themselves symptomatic. The inventor-heroes this' time will be seen as replicating the power of writing and literacy inscribed in the colonial situation, not merely as recapitulating the world history of writing in a more handy format. In at least two of my examples, it was the European missionaries who themselves played the rôles of hero.

In 1866, the Austrian Christian Kauder, trying to make his catechism more accessible to the Micmac or Megum Indians of Eastern Canada, drew up a list consisting of no less than 5701 different signs, each representing a word of the native language. As if to apply inversely Friedrich's rule about the inverse relationship between technical perfection and originality, Kauder underestimated the Indians' perfectibility so much that he invented a completely useless, if original, system. 'The absurdity of the system', Gelb dryly comments, 'is best illustrated by the fact that it contains separate signs even for such little used words or names as Vienna and Austria' (Gelb 1963, p. 207).

We know more about a Wesleyan missionary, James Evans from England, who a little earlier, in the 1840s, designed a syllabary consisting of 44 simple geometric signs for the Cree Indians in Canada. This script was more successful than that of his Austrian colleague: although originally only a few prayer books and catechisms were printed for distribution among the Indians, Evans' system became widely used among the Indians who, making use of the easily learnt script for messages inscribed with charred sticks on birchbark sheets, reportedly referred to Evans as 'the man who made birchbark talk' (Harper 1983, p. 3). In 1861, the entire Bible was printed in Cree syllabics by the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. Evans repeatedly modified his system, adapting it to several native languages. In spite of criticism,<sup>11</sup> a modified version adapted to Inuktituk by two other missionaries, John Horden and E.A. Watkins, in the 1850s proved even more successful and has been in use ever since, playing an increasingly important rôle for Canadian Inuit ethnic self-assertiveness

today. For once it was the white man who wondered about the magic of writing. A free trader from Baffin Island thus tells us in a letter to one of his colleagues dated 1907:

It may interest you to hear that I am in the habit of carrying letters written under the supervision of the Danish priests by the Eskimo of Western Greenland to the Eskimo of the West Coast of Davis Strait and of taking back the answers written by the West Coast natives in what looked to me symbols, each symbol representing not a letter but a syllable, and that these Eskimo with hundreds of miles of sea between them can understand one another and take a genuine interest in hearing from the other side (Harper 1983, p. 18, see also Harper 1985).

Discussions among 19th century missionaries and philologists concerning syllabaries versus alphabetical orthographies for the Eskimo or Indian languages are not much different in principle from discussions about orthography elsewhere. The minutes of a conference on the issue attended by John Horden and other missionaries in 1865 state rather bluntly: 'We consider that in dealing with the uncultivated tribes of North America, utility and simplicity are of more importance than philological precision' (Harper 1985, p. 18). Their magic, our technology; their technology, our science....

The Siberian Chuckchee shepherd Tenevil, about whose script much less is known, apparently acted independently from any philologist or missionary. Tenevil developed his 'extraordinary primitive' (Friedrich 1938, 216)<sup>12</sup>—and therefore, following Friedrich's law, extremely original—ideographic writing consisting of at least 120–140 different signs apparently without any foreign help or influence. Although he taught his children and neighbours to write in his way, the only surviving documents are 14 wooden tablets inscribed by himself and brought home to the 'Arctic Institute' in Leningrad in 1933. Some of these tablets, scratched with nails or some other sharp objects, are biographical: he was brought up somewhere near the coast, his mother barely survived by preparing fur and sewing gloves for local traders. Famine was endemic through most of his life, both his parents died early, and he went to join the reindeer nomads of the interior parts of the country. Driven by famine once more, he finally joined the Russians<sup>13</sup> and was employed as herdsman on a big state-owned reindeer farm, presumably established in the wake of the massive collectivization and sedentarization campaigns of those years. Tenevil invented his script in about 1929, reportedly using it at first for diaries and book-keeping in connection with his work at the farm. By 1932, a team of Soviet scientists had already developed an alphabetical transcription for the Chuckchee language; Tenevil's script apparently did not survive its inventor.

The invention and development of Tenevil's script shows no tendency at all towards phonetization. But it is interesting to note that whereas most ordinary words are given purely conventional signs, items of Russian provenance such as plates and glasses, teapots and bowls, paraffin and train oil containers, are represented by easily recognizable pictures. According to one theory, Tenevil was unable to move forward to the level of conventional representations when confronting these new, little-known,

objects. An alternative then, would be that it was exactly the demands of his radically new situation, as employee of a newly established Soviet State Farm, together with his exposure to modern industrial products, that led Tenevil to his invention. Friedrich's recapitulationist suggestion was that the Tenevil story, 'better than other modern script-inventions can give us an image of how the oldest inventions of writing came about' (1938, p. 218).

Turning to the Alaska Eskimos and their script, invented around 1900, we once more encounter missionaries. The hero of this story, Neck or Uyakoq, was born in 1860. To begin with he travelled around a lot as a traditional shaman, but around the turn of the century he converted to Christianity. Together with other catechists he attended many meetings where the newly converted were instructed by, among others, the American missionary John Hinz. For mnemotechnical purposes, Neck quickly developed his own system of stenography for use on his future proselytizing expeditions. Like that of his friend Isaak or Quiatuaq, Neck's first system was mainly logographic. Later on, however, Neck—as if supported by his teachers in the attempt to live up to recapitulationist expectations—developed a word syllabic script with increasing tendencies towards phonetization.

Unlike Tenevil's abortive invention, Neck's invention originated in a classroom. Although quite directly inspired by his teachers' alphabetical literacy, Neck designed his own signs and characters, some of them taken from the Latin alphabet, others being schematized pictures, and others again deriving from the signs traditionally used among his fellow tribesmen in the lists of expected gifts which, scratched on small pieces of wood, were circulated from host to guest before major potlatch exchanges between the villages.

Most of what Neck and his friends wrote down were of course transcriptions and reproductions from catechisms and the Bible. But Neck is also the author of an account of some of his proselytizing voyages. In six of the eight pages, which have come down to us (Schmitt 1940, vol. 1, pp. 457–77), he describes the people asking him on one occasion if it was true that the White Man has poisoned the water. Neck denied this, but they would not believe him. Otherwise he notes for every village visited if the women attended his gathering and to what extent his audience listened properly to what he had to say. He also relates how he was able to feed himself and especially his dogs and that, when he was asked what it was he came for, he answered that he came to bring the word. It is in his very last remarks, however, that Neck most explicitly reveals whom he is writing for and how he conceives of his rôle in the history of writing: 'And now I shall ask you for a book, which is not written, and which shall be my bible, and which one of you should buy for me, with leather binding like a Bible and as thick, and which doesn't fall apart' (Schmitt 1940, p. 476).

We do not know if Neck ever received the gift he was asking for. Neither do we know what use Neck would have made of his unwritten book. It seems fair to suggest, however, that Schmitt, with his well documented study of every single step in the development of Neck's writing, comes close to satisfying Neck's demand. Schmitt treated the development of Neck's writing exclusively as a uniquely appropriate allegory for the development of writing in general:



Nowhere else do we in the same way have the opportunity step by step to follow the development of a system of writing from a beginning with the most simple pictures to a well designed and fluent system of writing with strokes (linear writing) on the basis of documents (Schmitt 1940, vol. 1: p. XIII).

Schmitt's history of writing, as well as his account of Neck's writing, is totally purified of all traces of context:

When another script is newly deciphered, we normally get access through this to new linguistic and historical knowledge. Neither is the case here. The documents of the development of the Alaskan script...offer almost exclusively extracts from the Bible, moreover in part rather poorly translated or remembered. The value of our documents therefore almost exclusively derives from the fact that this exemplary case allows us better than any other to observe how the development of a script comes about. Therefore we will first of all deal with what fundamentally ('grundsätzlich') can be learnt from this case about the history of writing, rather than with the particulars of this specific script (Schmitt 1940, p. XIV).

Neck died in 1924—and his script with him.

The earliest and best known of all our stories is that of Sikwayi or Sequoyah, also called George Guess, and his syllabary for the Cherokee language dating from the early 1820s, possibly a source of inspiration for some of the later inventions as well.

About the time that Gen. Washington had taken, for the second time, his oath of office as President of the United States..., in one of the skirmishes between the white men and Indians, the Cherokees took a white man prisoner, and in his pocket, they found a crumpled piece of paper, which was a letter from a friend. The shrewdness of the prisoner was such as to lead him to interpret this letter for his own advantage. The story that this talking leaf told filled them with wonder and they accepted it as a message from the Great Spirit (Foster 1885, pp. 91–2).

One of the Cherokee Indians, however, Sequoyah, did not believe in all this:

They laid the matter before Sequoyah, who was accounted by them as a brave man favored by the Great Spirit. He belived it simply to be an invention by the white men. 'Much that red men know, they forget,' said Sequoyah, 'they have no way to preserve it. Whte men make what they know fast on paper like catching a wild animal and taming it'. But long did Sequoyah ponder over the mystery. For weeks and months did he wonder and dream over that 'talking leaf (Forster 1885, p. 92).

Sequoyah's motivation also derived from a later incident which likewise set him apart from the rest of his community:

Some of the young Cherokee braves were one evening reclining around the campfire, when they began making remarks about the superior talents of white people. One said, that white men could put their talk on paper and send it to any distance, and it would be understood by those who received it. They all agreed that this was very strange, but they could not see how it could be done. Sequoyah...sat there quietly listening. At length he raised himself and said:—'You are all fools. I can do it myself. The thing is very easy', and picking up a flat stone, commenced scratching on it with a pin and after a few moments, he read them a sentence which he had written, making a sign for each word. His attempt to write, produced a laugh from his companions and the conversation ended. But this laugh stung Sequoyah to action and he put his inventive powers to work (Forster 1885, p. 94).

Thus inspired, Sequoyah frequented the Moravian Mission Schools and, although he never learnt English, came in possession of 'a whole bundle of white men's talking leaves, in shape of an English Spelling Book'. After an accident where he badly hurt his knee so that he could no longer take part in either war or hunting expeditions, Sequoyah involuntarily had the time to pursue his interests.

Then day by day, he sat at his cabin door, listening to the voices of nature. ... And Sequoyah perceived that feelings and passions were conveyed by different sounds, and often, when he was wearied with his long thinking of that talking leaf taken years before from the captive, he would listen to the song of the birds, the waving grass, the rustle of the oak leaves, and the more measured tones of the needles of sombre pines, and the ripple of the brook until he dozed, and these songs of nature often took in his dreams the form of Cherokee words, and Sequoyah would awake and tell his wife and children what the leaves of the trees and Nature had whispered to him in Cherokee (Forster 1885, pp. 95–6).

Sequoyah worked and meditated in isolation from 1809 to 1821, when he finally came up with a syllabary for the Cherokee language consisting of 200 different signs, a number he later, in 1824, reduced to 85 characters, most of them being letters from the English spelling book to which he had assigned syllabic values. His neighbours and fellow tribesmen, according to Forster's hagiography, first laughed at him once more, but this time Sequoyah succeeded in his attempt to demonstrate that the white men's magic was, in fact, due to purely human inventiveness. His fellow Indians gave in when he made first his daughter and then some other young Indians read aloud for a congregation of elders. Jensen adds to Forster's lyrical description that the missionaries also approved: 'In the year 1824 Sikwayi's by now completed script was examined by the missionaries

and declared suitable for the written representation of the Cherokee language' (Jensen 1969, p. 234).

The use of the Sequoyan script spread with remarkable speed, a newspaper was founded a few years later, with an average of 200 copies weekly. The shamans used the script to note down their spells and songs (Jensen 1969, p. 234), and especially the young men among the Indians became almost addicted:

Indeed it is a historical fact, that the enthusiasm of the young men became so great, that they even abandoned in a measure, the practice of archery, hunting and fishing so as to devote more time to letter writing as an amusement, and...they went long journeys for the sole purpose of writing and sending back letters to their friends (Forster 1885, pp. 109–10).

According to a more recent collection of *Social documents of the Cherokees, 1862–1964*, the Cherokee people, after having thus achieved literacy, 'produced an enormous body of manuscript literature recording nearly every aspect of their culture' (Frederick & Kilpatrick 1965, p. VIII). Cherokee literacy was remarkable for the variety of purposes for which it was used. Apart from the weekly newspaper already mentioned and a few translations from the Bible, a large number of private letters and contracts were written down in Sequoyah's syllabary so that 'thirty years ago one might have obtained manuscripts in syllabary by the truckload. Today the average Cherokee cabin is likely to be as devoid of a single scrap of Sequoyan as it is of a copy of Catullus' (Frederick & Kilpatrick 1965, p. VIII).

Sequoyah, the earliest of all the examples reviewed above, was clearly inspired by the presence of the Moravian Mission. The English spelling book in his possession undoubtedly played an important rôle in his appreciation of the technology by which white men made leaves talk. The contention that changes in the 'colonial situation', the displacement of power and authority from missionaries to secular authorities, did in fact play a major rôle for most, if not all modern inventions of writing, is confirmed by the fact that Sequoyah, only four years later, in 1828 when he took part in a Cherokee delegation to Washington DC, was officially recognized by the Congress itself: 'Congress took due recognition then...and as a recognition of his greatness, they declared that the sum of \$500 should be given him as a token of appreciation of the benefit he had conferred upon his people in inventing for them an alphabet' (Forster 1885, pp. 151–2). The Congress moreover gave \$2000 annually for ten years 'to be expended under the direction of the United States for the education of their children', and \$1000 'toward the purchase of a printing press and type to aid the Cherokees in their progress in education and to benefit and enlighten them as a people' (Forster 1885, p. 152).

It has been suggested that Sequoyah's widely known invention was a direct source of inspiration for African examples of the invention of scripts. The possibility of some historical connection between Sequoyah's invention and that of Dualu Bukele (see below) is indicated by the fact that the Cherokee script received immediate encouragement from the American Board of Foreign Missions, and was publicized by them during the 1820s in their journal, the *Missionary Herald*. It was an agent of this

same society, J.L. Wilson, who first reported the invention of the Vai syllabary only a few years later (in 1834, also in the *Missionary Herald*) (Dalby 1968, pp. 167–8). The Vaisyllabary, consisting of 226 different signs, was devised in about 1833 by Dualu Bukele who was assisted in this task by a number of friends. A German philology student, S.W. Koelle, who received the news in 1849, immediately went to see for himself. When he finally found Bukele in the town of Bandakoro, he asked him to tell him about his invention, and was told the following story:

About fifteen years ago, I had a dream, in which a tall, venerable looking white man in a long coat appeared to me, saying: ‘I am sent to you by other white men... I bring you a book’. Doalu said: This is very good; but tell me now, what is the nature of this book?’ The white messenger answered: ‘I am sent to bring this book to you, in order that you should take it to the rest of the people. But I must tell you that neither you, nor any who will become acquainted with the book, are allowed to eat the flesh of dogs and monkeys, nor of any thing found dead, whose throat was not cut; and not to touch the book on those days on which you have touched the fruit of the To-tree (a kind of very sharp pepper)’. The messenger then showed Doalu his book, and taught him, to write any Vei words in the same way, in which the book was written... ‘Look, this sign (writing the sign with his finger on the ground), Doalu, means i (English e)’. Then he wrote close to it another sign, saying, ‘and this means na. Now, Doalu, read both together!’ Doalu did so, and was quite delighted, to have learnt to read the word ina, i. e. ‘come here’. In the same way the messenger showed him how a great number of other words could be written. At last Doalu asked his instructor about the contents of the book he had brought. But the answer was. ‘Wait a little, I shall tell you by and by’. After this, Doalu awoke, but, as he told me in a sorrowfull tone, was never afterwards informed of what was written in the book. In the morning he called his friends together, in order to tell them his dream.... They were all exceedingly pleased with the dream and quite sure that it was a divine revelation.... Though Doalu had been well instructed in his dreams, yet, as he told me, in the morning he could not remember all the signs which had been shown him by night. Therefore—these are his own words—he and his friends put their heads together in order to make new ones. And on this ground we are fully justified in speaking of a real invention of the Vei mode of writing (Koelle 1854, pp. 235–6).

Dualu’s fascination with writing, however, goes even further back than this dream. As a child, he had been taught to read by a missionary for three months, whereafter this particular missionary went home to Europe for reasons not indicated in the sources (Koelle 1854, p. 236). Later, Dualu was a servant for some coastal slave traders and there had his own Bellerophonian experiences:

They often sent him on an errand to distant places, from which he had generally to bring back letters to his master. In these letters his master was sometimes informed, when Doalu had done any mischief in the place to which he had been sent. Now this forcibly struck him. He said to himself: 'How is this, that my master knows every thing which I have done in a distant place? He only looks into the book, and this tells him all. Such a thing we ought also to have, by which we could speak with each other, though separated by a great distance' (Koelle 1854, pp. 236–7).

Like some of the other West African hero-inventors, Dualu Bukele had been exposed not only to Christian missionaries and their Latin alphabet, but also to Islam and, not least, to the various forms of what Dalby (1967, 1968) has called 'sub-Arabic', magico-cryptic alphabets and mystical symbols which combined the inspiration derived from indigenous graphic symbols traditionally in much use among the groups for which syllabaries were later invented. In various combinations, all of these influences were instrumental in producing the almost inflationary inventions of syllabaries in West Africa and among the 'Bush Negroes' of Surinam in the first decades of this century.

The Mende syllabary, consisting of up to 195 different characters and mostly used for correspondence and record keeping, was devised by the Muslim tailor Kisimi Kamara in 1921. He too had a revelatory dream, but not much is known about it. The Loma syllabary, also mostly used for records and correspondence and consisting of at least 185 different characters, was designed in 1930 by a certain Wido Zobo. In his dream God appeared. Wido

accusing him of leaving the Loma in ignorance, God told him that he feared the power of writing would cause them to lose respect for their traditional beliefs and customs and to become over-proud. Wido swore that the Loma would continue to live as in the past, that they would respect the 'secret of initiation', and that he would never teach the script to a woman. God then instructed him how to prepare ink from the leaves of a creeper' (Dalby 1968, p. 162).

Chief Gbili, inventor in the 1930s of the Kpelle syllabary of at least 88 characters which was mainly used for correspondence also 'had a dream in which an angel revealed the script to him' (Dalby 1968, p. 162). And Afaka Atumisi, an unbaptized Christian 'Bush Negro' from Surinam, who in 1910 invented the Djuka syllabary consisting of 58 characters and mainly used for religious texts and the Catholic missionaries' catechisms, was visited in his dream by a spirit sent by God in the form of a white man. The spirit gave him a blank sheet of paper and informed him that a script would be revealed to him' (Dalby 1968, pp. 162–3). Only the most recent of them all, the 401-sign Bete syllabary invented in 1956 by Frédéric Bruly-Brouabé, did not begin with a dream. Bruly-Brouabé, a fluent reader and writer in French, was inspired by the mysterious shapes of certain mineral crystals

and by a traditional children's game, in which a nonsense-language is 'read' from lines of stones or palm nuts (Dalby 1968, p. 158). Revelatory dreams thus played an important rôle in most cases. As a rule, the inventors were young men of about 25 years old, and all of them lived in areas where Christian missions had been operating for some time. Some of them were also acquainted with Islam and the Arabic script and 'subscripts'.

I now turn to the last example, the Bamum syllabary invented by King Njoya in about 1903. Njoya knew about writing from the Muslim Hausa traders. According to his own words, it was the arrival of the Germans that led him to invent his own script:

But when he saw that also the Europeans, who by then had advanced to Fumban, mastered the art of reading and writing, he felt himself surpassed on all sides and deeply hurt in his pride as a chief. He didn't want to take over the Hausa script, because he found the Hausa themselves disgusting, and he couldn't believe that it would be possible to write the Bamum language too with the European script. Thus the brilliant idea came upon him to create his own script (Schmitt 1963, pp. 14–15).

This is the only account of a script's invention originally written in the script invented:

The Bamum understand how to write; King Njoya has taught them this writing. When king Njoya was asleep, a dream came and circled around him and said he should take a board, write something like the hand of man, wash it off and drink it. Next day he wrote, washed off and drank. When he sat there, his heart told him that if he wanted to write a script, he should call the people and say they should think of various things, write them and come with it; then he would choose the good signs among them and make them into a script. The people wrote, and came with it. It wasn't enough. They stopped doing it. King Njoya tried five times; it wasn't enough. When he then called once more, it was enough. He taught it to the people. Many people learned it. He was very happy' (Schmitt 1963, p. 18).

The script, which developed through various stages of increasing phonetization, ending up as a syllabary of only 70 different characters, was used for a variety of purposes. Among the documents collected are the various versions of the Royal History, which again seem to have been inspired directly by the large number of translations from the Old Testament forming the majority of the earliest documents (Schmitt 1963, p. 183). There are also administrative documents such as maps of the region, laws and collections of criminal verdicts, a large number of letters, death announcements, contracts, records of commercial transactions, marriage announcements and agreements, a catechism, as well as a number of the king's addresses and speeches. After 1913, Njoya also opened more than 47 different schools, called 'Houses of Writing', all recorded on the map of his kingdom. Njoya

was very eager to see his writing in print. After having asked in vain both the missionaries and the political colonial authorities to produce printed versions of some of his texts, he ordered one of his men to manufacture his own printing press with movable Bamum-letters. But when this man, Monliper, finally succeeded, in 1920, the French had taken over: Lieutenant Prestat banned both his script and his schools so that Njoya had no choice but to give orders to melt the copper plates of his press again (Schmitt 1963, pp. 187–8). When Prestat was removed only a year later, it was too late.

One of the most interesting of Njoya's documents concerns the voyage undertaken in the course of preparing a map of his kingdom. The scribe registered no less than 2004 persons as members of the delegation—671 women and 1333 men—and 87 horses: a really impressive troop. The addresses which Njoya gave in every village dealt with his own merits, especially as creator of the Bamum script.

Before, he said for example, in the case of legal disputes, one had no other possibility than to rely on God's judgement (both parts are made to drink poison; vomiting it means innocence). Now one can let the king's scribes commit all legal affairs to paper. On the basis of these documents it is always possible easily to establish the true situation. Furthermore he referred to what the books, in which all cases of birth, marriage and death were registered with the aid of writing, meant for law and order in the country (Schmitt 1963, p. 184).

While these speeches were undoubtedly meant to impress his audience and subjects, they were really also aimed at the German colonial authorities, to whom Njoya tried to prove that he was in fact the most important ally in the region. To this end, Njoya stationed two interpreters at the German headquarters in Bamenda, and these were replaced every second month. Their task was to translate the letters, reports and documents sent by Njoya and written in his script, into 'Negro-English', the lingua franca of the region at that time, and in return to transcribe the messages and answers of the German 'Kommander' from Negro-English to Bamum writing (Schmitt 1963). Njoya's report of his circumambulation of his kingdom was handled in exactly this way.

There is therefore little doubt of the fundamental importance of the German colonial authorities in the invention and use of Bamum syllabic literacy. Missionaries apparently played an equally important rôle, not only for his script but also for the secret language which Njoya invented in about 1911. By then Anna Wuhrmann, later Rein-Wuhrmann, was the director of the missionary girls' school at Fumban. One day Njoya asked her if she could speak French, explaining that some time ago he had met a Frenchman and that he had found the sound of his language exceptionally beautiful. Mrs Wuhrmann agreed and read aloud from a letter in French which she happened to have with her. He listened attentively, and asked her several times to repeat certain words, especially those ending with—*ion*. In the subsequent weeks, Njoya almost daily sent one of his servants to her, asking her to say aloud certain beautiful words of the French language. Mrs Wuhrmann did not know what to think of the affair, and finally

asked not to be called upon to do this any more. The servant's visits stopped. But a little later, Njoya himself told her that he had invented a new, secret language, and in order to give her some impression of it he said: '*Ton nom, Anna Wuhrmann, dans cette langue est magnifique: tu t'appelles Lasisvenère Pistenawaskopus*' (Schmitt 1963, p. 215).

Njoya's secret language was in fact older than this episode: a missionary reported as early as 1911 already that an '*aus vielen Sprachen zusammengestoppelte Volapük-Sprache*' was taught at his school. This language consisted of words taken from a number of African and European languages, each of them replacing a word of the Bamum language, totally independent from the word's original meaning and organized, moreover, according to a constantly changing code. Secret court languages were not new in Western Africa, but Njoya's persistent use of his, in some cases only phonetical, knowledge of German, French, and English as well as several African languages was a new way of constructing a mode of secret communication.

The invention of both script and language were part of Njoya's strategy *vis-à-vis* the neighbouring chiefs and especially the rival colonial authorities. Anna Rein-Wuhrmann's sympathetic account of his life aptly captures the dilemma that he had confronted:

When the first Europeans approached in July 1902, the Bamum people was deeply disturbed in its feelings. They had heard adventurous stories about their power, but wanted nevertheless to fight the strangers. Only through a trick did Njoya succeed in preserving his people from misery and distress. With the advent of the whites a new time came to Fumban too. The king began to bear on both shoulders, to play a double game. What else could he have done! He wanted to protect some of the old customs against the new, but in several matters he was forced to submit to the government officials. Many of his subjects and especially his advisers did not understand this necessity and tried to turn him against the new masters in the country. Thus Njoya became cunning, concealed many things and distorted others for the sake of peace (Rein-Wuhrmann 1925, p. 150).

Not only playing the Germans off against his own people, as Rein-Wuhrmann suggests, but also the German secular and missionary authorities against each other, as well as the intervening British and French, Njoya made use of the written word in an instructively inventive way: he certainly knew about the connections between the magic of the written word and writing as a technology for the graphic representation of spoken language. He also understood how to manipulate both, in order to strengthen his position in a complex colonial situation. His invention of writing was perhaps more inventive than others, but his and all the other cases reviewed above clearly demonstrate that 'recapitulating' the early history of writing under modern colonial conditions has more to do with these conditions than most of the recapitulationist interpretations of these inventions are willing to admit.



There is no reason to deny that syllabaries, for some languages at least, are easier to devise, as well as to learn, than are alphabetical systems. But the function of non-alphabetical systems of writing invented under the influence of Christian missions and the impact of alphabetical literacy certainly needs to be explained by other factors as well. Rather than 'recapitulating' stages of a presumed development, these inventions should be taken as symptoms of the function of modes of communication in the cultural implementation, reproduction, and transformation of social identities in a constant interplay with other modes of communication. The power to include some while excluding others is common to all kinds of writing, indeed to all modes of communication, including the most obvious case, language itself. Through being thought of as mystery and magic for some while merely serving transparent, technological functions for others,<sup>14</sup> alphabetical literacy sometimes creates and produces a need for alternatives: the modern inventors of syllabaries, whether native or missionary, satisfied this need through the creation of systems of communication, whose function likewise was both to include and exclude, to communicate and to excommunicate.

Missionaries and picture Bibles presumably played a major rôle in all the examples considered in this chapter. The missionaries' awareness and knowledge of the double nature of writing as both revealed and invented, magic and technology, as well as the even more important fact that they acted according to this knowledge, was crucial to the modern inventions of writing. That this was so makes these inventions useless for the purposes of the palaeographers' 'recapitulationist' comparisons. Orientalist palaeographers have more to learn from anthropology and 'contemporary primitives' than simply that history repeats itself in the form of development. Marx already knew the tragedies, when repeated, take the form of farce.

I have argued above that disjunction between book and Bible, the fact that literacy and writing came to be seen as independent factors, and that the history of writing therefore became a major concern should be seen as important preconditions for modern inventions of writing. These developments took place alongside corresponding changes in the colonial situation towards a more organized division of labour between mission and administration, religious and secular education. Most of these inventions took place in Western Africa at a time when the number of publications concerning the history of writing, and the various forms of magic and superstition connected with it, also reached its peak in Europe. These two phenomena have more in common than we tend to imagine.

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## Notes

- 1 The focus of magic technology is obviously the emblematic power of the compass, not difficult to understand in terms of the importance of the compass for the discovery and survival of all the New World colonies. Yet this focus does not really concern navigation but rather the compass's propensity for fascinating the native. In other words, in this context technology functions as magic rather than as technology' (Hulme 1985, p. 21).
- 2 '...primitive man's astonishment at, and awe of, pictures, and of writing in particular through which by some amazing process the words speak from afar, as if a spirit spoke' (Dornsieff 1925, p. 1). 'Primitive peoples, however, confronted with such a script, are filled, by the mysteriousness of this phenomenon, not only with wonder, but with actual consternation' (Schmitt 1963, p. 2).
- 3 What is presumably the earliest version of this story goes back to 1679: Schmitt 1963, p. 2. See also Gelb 1963, p. 232, quoting a German Jesuit from the late 18th century for the same story.
- 4 Flowers and fruits can apparently be used to much the same effect: The natives of Ternate and the other Moluccan islands make use; on the most important occasions, of certain flowers and fruits to make their thoughts known to absent fellow tribesmen. This language is so secret that it is not unusual to use the very persons doomed to die to deliver certain fruits to others selected to take revenge on them' (Meiners 1788, p. 421).
- 5 Among the books dealing with the history of writing are the following, which I mention because this discussion, although largely forgotten, is an interesting precursor of today's discussions about literacy: Steinthal 1852, Wuttke 1872, Faulmann 1878, 1880, Berger 1891, Delitzsch 1897, Stübe 1907, 1912–13, 1921, Danzel 1912, Weule 1915 (which by 1921 had no less than 20 editions); Kuehl 1905, Mieses 1919, Jensen 1925, 1969, Pries 1927, Ehmcke 1925, 1927, Delitsch 1928, Degering 1929, Bömer 1931, Wirth 1931, Petrau 1933 (which is not only the most confused but also, as its subtitle suggests, comes close indeed to being the most revealing in terms of the author's ideological concerns); Diringier 1937.
- 6 Wundt (1910, p. 304) in fact claims that belief in the magical protective power of the written word is widespread among all literate peoples; especially when it has just been introduced. 'The unknown, through a close association of the feelings, becomes the uncanny, and the uncanny becomes the magical'.
- 7 'If one wants a clue to the understanding of this belief in the power of writing, one must take several things into consideration. First one must reflect on what a novelty the emergence of writing must have been felt to be in the development of humanity' (Bertholet 1949, p. 6).
- 8 The general shift of opinion appears clearly from the opening passage of Gaur's *A history of writing*: 'Most works dealing with the history of writing look upon writing mainly as a means of reproducing language with the aid of graphic symbols. This attitude automatically imposes a hierarchical structure. If the aim of writing is the reproduction of language, then the most advanced form of writing is the one which reproduces language most accurately, in the most economical manner—which inevitably leads to the alphabet.... Until very recently such an attitude was indeed perfectly justifiable, perhaps even self-evident: but during the last 30 years,

- especially during the last decade, the situation has changed dramatically. As we advance further and further into the new age of information technology...' (Gaur 1984, p. 7).
- 9 Leipzig 1940. This first edition was destroyed in World War II, a second shortened version appeared in 1951 with the more appropriate title *Die Alaska Schrift und ihre schriftgeschichtliche Bedeutung*.
  - 10 This term was suggested to me by Michael Cole, who in a series of lectures about the history of cultural psychology at the University of Copenhagen (autumn 1986) used it to characterize the main trends of the abortive discipline called *Völkerpsychologie*.
  - 11 The Anglican Bishop of Rupert's Land, 1849: The Wesleyans...have, very unfortunately...adopted a new character.... A few of the Indians can read by means of these syllabic characters; but if they had only been taught to read their own language in our letters, it would have been one step towards the acquisition of the English tongue'. (Quoted from Harper 1983, p. 11).
  - 12 'Even the writing utensils and materials are primitive- wooden boards and nails or cutting tools. Primitive, too, seem the arbitrariness of the direction of writing and positioning of the signs-and the apparently complete lack of phonetic elements of writing, which otherwise appear very early in similar imperfect scripts.... In Tenevil, then, we really seem at last to have before us an inventor of writing who has created his work completely by himself, without outside influence.'
  - 13 Throughout his life, he went hungry many times and for long periods. Then the thought occurred to him to go over to the Russians, where one could better eat one's fill' (Friedrich 1938, p. 210).
  - 14 To some extent the distinction between 'discursive' and 'presentational' symbols advanced by Probst, in his discussion of literacy and conversion in Western Nigeria, aims at a similar duality of writing and literacy without, however, making explicit the specific historical context (see Probst 1987, conclusion).

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EUROPEAN COLONIALISM, THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF INDIGENOUS  
STATE FORMS, AND THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN  
NATIONAL STATES



*Patrimonialism, involution, and the agrarian question in Java: a Weberian analysis of class relations and servile labour*

J.I.(HANS) BAKKER

**Introduction**

State organization outside the Western tradition has been analysed by writers as diverse as Fred Riggs (1966), Paul Mus (1964), Burton Stein (1977) and Karl Wittfogel (1981), but no adequate general models are widely accepted (Steinberg *et al.* 1971). In order to analyse the impact of colonialism on Java in the 19th century it is necessary to have a model of pre-colonial political centralization (Soedjatmoko *et al.* 1965a, 1965b). Similarly, in order to examine class relations in 19th century Java it is useful to place the Javanese case in a broader, comparative theoretical perspective. In this chapter the outlines of a general argument concerning 19th century Indonesia are sketched in so as to provide a broader framework for idiographic, historical information (Hall & Whitmore 1976).

This analysis of class relations and political centralization in Java attempts to clarify a number of theoretical questions ordinarily left vague in the discussions of 'involution' (Geertz 1963, 1984) and the 'agrarian question' in Indonesia generally (Kahn 1985). Those questions are:

- (a) What was the nature of the classic, pre-colonial Indic state in Java?
- (b) What was the structure of the colonial state in Java in the 19th century?
- (c) What were the historical conflicts among different classes and factions that influenced the agrarian structure of Java during the cultivation system (1830–70)?

The general thesis is that: (a) the classic Indic state in Java is best characterized by the ideal type model of 'patrimonial-prebendalism', (b) the colonial state established only a superficial layer of 'rational-legal bureaucracy', and (c) class relations in Java were 'prebendal', in part because the mercantilist faction in the Netherlands was able to hold on to power until at least 1848.

The argument follows the 'Historical School', particularly Max Weber (Schumpeter 1954, pp. 800–24).<sup>1</sup> Hence, this analysis is based on the premise of 'historicist' rather than strictly 'objectivist' theoretical assumptions (Kahn 1985, pp. 80–1, 89–93).<sup>2</sup>



Nevertheless, the arguments put forward by Geertz concerning the 'theatre state' and the process of 'involution' are examined critically. The general argument is that Java underwent a process I have called the 'bureaucratization of patrimonialism' (Bakker 1978).

### Classic Indic states

In his work on the 19th century Balinese state Geertz (1980, p. 62) maintains that: The *negara* was, in Weber's now standard sense of the terms, neither a bureaucratic, nor a feudal, nor a patrimonial state.' Furthermore, he argues that this applies not merely to 19th century Bali but to other Southeast Asian societies as well. The 'characteristic form of the Indicized state in Indonesia' is viewed by Geertz (1980, p. 9) as 'a model which can then be used generally to extend our understanding of the developmental history of Indic Indonesia (Cambodia, Thailand, Burma) (see Heine-Geldern 1930, 1942, 1958). Geertz's model of the 'theatre state', however, might very easily be subsumed under Weber's ideal type model of the 'patrimonial state'.

Sandhu & Wheatley (1983, pp. 8–18) do just that.<sup>3</sup> They accept Weber's 'patrimonialism' as directly relevant to Classic Indic states and go on to cite Geertz's discussions of the exemplary centre' and 'the theatre state'. Wheatley (1977, 1983, p. 318) clearly distinguishes 'patrimonial' from 'feudal' forms, or, technically, 'patrimonial-prebendal' from 'patrimonial-feudal' forms (Weber 1968, pp. 1006–110). Wheatley does not discuss Geertz's 'theatre state' as an alternative model at all.

State organization has not been well conceptualized for Southeast Asia, according to Geertz (1983, p. ix), and this has led to a:

certain provinciality in our thinking about power, dominance, command, loyalty, legitimacy, obedience, resistance, rivalry and rebellion...In particular, the so-called 'Indic' or 'Indianized' or 'Hindu-Buddhist' or 'Classical' states of Southeast Asia...have not been much looked at in terms of what they might tell us about the nature of politics in general...

However, in making that statement Geertz ignores the Weberian model of 'patrimonial-prebendalism' which has been used by van Leur (1937, 1955), Wheatley (1983), Tambiah (1976), and others. There is a family resemblance among the Javanese, Balinese, Burmese, Thai, and Cambodian cases which is captured—in a preliminary, ideal typic manner—by Weber's model. Perhaps the first writer to connect Weber's 'patrimonialism' with Southeast Asia was J. C. van Leur (1955), as was pointed out by Wertheim (1954, 1965, Soedjatmoko *et al.* 1965a, pp. 346–7).<sup>4</sup> Van Leur was interested in the contrast between inland and coastal states. During the period of the pinnacle of 'Hindu-Javanese' civilization in the 14th century 'Madjapahit [Majapahit] combined the agri cultural strength of an island kingdom with the commercial power of a coastal empire...' (Peacock 1973, p. 14, Pigeaud 1960). Van Leur was the first to indicate

that Majapahit can be considered 'patrimonial'. Subsequently a few other writers have utilized Weber's model to examine historical evidence concerning Indic states (Bakker 1979).

### Weber's typology

Weber (1968, 1006 ff.) characterizes 'patrimonial-prebendal' structure in terms of at least six ideal type characteristics:

- (a) one ruler who has all political legitimacy under his control;
- (b) prebendal officials (*ministeriales*) who have no independent power base but must conform to the wishes of the patrimonial ruler;
- (c) *ad hoc* administration and decision making without a regularized and 'rational-legal' body of laws and administrative codes;
- (d) royal domains throughout the land, with few—if any—independent land owners; hence, no separate baronial or monastic landed estates;
- (e) collective liability for traditional tribute; subjects are *coloni* who are attached to their villages and collectively liable to the patrimonial ruler and his prebendal officials for percentages of crop yields; and
- (f) for labour obligations (*corvée*). There is no 'free labour'. Producers are subject to servile labour.

The analysis of patrimonialism constitutes a significant part of Weber's sociology of traditional domination (Madan 1979).

All forms of domination occurring in history constitute according to Weber, 'combinations, mixtures, adaptations, or modification' of the charismatic, the traditional, and the legal type' (Bendix 1962, p. 329).<sup>5</sup>

The six ideal typical characteristics of 'patrimonial-prebendal' structure are not always found every where in exactly the same 'pure' form. Indeed, Weber's discussion (1968, pp. 1044–51) of Ancient Egypt and China indicates that significant differences can exist in historical instances. The use of the label 'patrimonial' to designate the model Weber develops at length in *Economy and society* has not been followed widely, even though Weber's discussions of 'charisma' and 'legal-rational bureaucracy' have had an enormous impact on sociological theory.

### Alternative models

There are at least six alternative ideal type models which have been applied to various regions in Southeast Asia:

- (a) 'hydraulic society',

- (b) 'Asiatic mode of production',
- (c) European-style 'feudalism',
- (d) European-style 'bureaucracy',
- (e) 'the theatre state' and
- (f) 'the segmentary state'.

There is something to be said for each of those models, of course, but I believe that the ideal type model which best fits the Classic Indic states of Southeast Asia is

- (g) 'patrimonial-prebendalism'.

### *Hydraulic society and oriental deposition*

At first glance Wittfogel's 'hydraulic society' would seem to be a reasonable candidate. The 'empire' of Majapahit, for example, was closely tied to the development of wet rice, *sawah* cultivation in the dense tropical forest lands of Trik (van Setten 1979, pp. 8, 136). Divine kingship was important to largescale irrigation projects under the Sailendra (Çailendra) and Kanjuruhan 'kingdoms' of Java, as well as Majapahit (Moertono 1968). However, Wittfogel was not interested in Southeast Asia so much as China. It is generally recognized that he extrapolates far beyond the evidence he has available (Eisenstadt 1958, Pulleybank 1958). By recycling the misleading term 'oriental despotism'. Wittfogel unnecessarily prejudices his argument with an outdated, ethnocentric label. Moreover, his main concern is with the 'Asiatic mode of production' question, particularly Lenin's alleged misuse of the Marxian concept (Wittfogel 1981, pp. 1–10, 369–412). Wittfogel can be viewed as contributing little that is new in terms of sociological understanding of Southeast Asia.

### *Asiatic mode of production*

There is a large literature on the Asiatic mode of production (AMP) (Krader 1975, 1976) and the ideal type construct has been defined in many ways (Thorner 1966, Bailey 1971). The general concept of 'mode of production' has been criticized (Friedman 1976) and it has been claimed that the term AMP is merely a residual category (Anderson 1974, p. 549). Amin (1973) has proposed using the term 'tributary mode of production' (TMP) to make it clear that this 'mode of production' can be found outside Asia as well. Wolf (1982, pp. 79–88) has gone so far as to reconceptualize 'modes of production' into three categories: kin-based, capitalist, and tributary. For Wolf the TMP also encompasses slavery and feudalism, a broadening of the term not originally intended by Amin. While the AMP model may be of value in interpreting Classic states in Southeast Asia, particularly in terms of Krader's (1976) concept of 'civil society', we are basically not dealing with one model but many (Godelier 1965, 1973). In so far as the AMP

model is relevant to Java I believe it can be incorporated with Weber's more precisely specified model.

The classic statement by Marx of the different modes of production is found in his preface to *Toward a critique of political economy*. Marx's writings on 'precapitalist economic formations' are contained in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973) and *Capital*, Vol. III (1960). Basically, the Asiatic mode of production represents a system in which chieftains, ruling groups, or priest-kings emerge who perform trading or military or irrigation functions. '[They] obtain the material means of life through taxes exacted more or less voluntarily from the communes' (Mandel 1969, pp. 34–5, cited by Dunn 1982, p. 6). It is not clear whether Marx meant to include:

- (a) the absence of private property,
- (b) the identity of rents with taxes, so that tribute takes the form of rents, and
- (c) the identity of the ruling class with the state apparatus.

To a certain extent Marx was still caught up in mid-19th century 'orientalism'. Turner (1978) is highly critical of the tendency to make polar distinctions between East and West and argues that Marxism today should challenge ethnocentric assumptions. In so far as Marx clarified the existence of tributary *relations* of production, however, he definitely made a conceptual breakthrough with the AMP model. The relations of production specifying the AMP are elaborated by Godelier (1973, pp. 84–5). I believe that the AMP is best viewed as encompassing exploitative relations both *within* the village sphere and *between* the village sphere and the supra-village sphere. The form and the content should be viewed as an intertwined social structure.

*Neo-Marxian aspects of Weber* Basically the refined Marxian model of the AMP (Lichtheim 1963) and the Weberian model of the 'patrimonialprebendal' structure can be reconciled. Weber is viewed here as less interested in the ideological 'superstructure' (e. g. a particular ethic) than in the analysis of 'class' (Lukačs 1972), a perspective that 'crystallized in the course of his dialogue with Marxism' (Zeitlin 1981, p. 127). Instead of the 'symbolic interactionist' Weber of many introductory textbooks, or the Parsonian version of Weber, it is the 'neo-Marxist' Weber of *The agrarian sociology of ancient civilizations* (1976) that is emphasized in this analysis (Turner 1974). Weber can be viewed as completing-in outline-Marxian analysis of relations of production in pre-capitalist societies. Therefore, I do not reject the AMP Model, but merely point out that

- (a) the model needs to be carefully specified beyond what one finds in Marx's original formulations,
- (b) it is not really one model, but many conflicting models, and
- (c) what is valuable in the AMP model can be further analysed through the model of relations of production implicit in Weber's 'patrimonialprebendal' model.

*Feudalism*

The argument that Classic Indic states represent some form of 'feudalism' is never made systematically. However, prominent and reputable writers use the term (e.g. Burger 1975) and political rhetoric in Indonesia commonly employs the term '*féodalisme*', which is derived from the Dutch. There definitely were periods of centrifugal, feudal-like political organization in many Indic states. However, those periods can be understood as part of the oscillation between 'patrimonial-prebendal' and incipient 'patrimonial-feudal' structures discussed by Weber. Full-fledged European-style feudalism was never the dominant ideology or structure in any of the major Indic states of Southeast Asia.

*Bureaucracy*

Similarly, 'rational-legal bureaucracy'—in Weber's sense—never existed as an indigenous state form in Southeast Asia during Classical times, although 'patrimonial bureaucracy' was very much in evidence (Weber 1968, pp. 229, 1014, 1026–31). Hence, I would agree with Geertz that the *negara* (*nagara*) was neither a bureaucratic nor a feudal state (Geertz 1980, p. 62).

*Theatre state*

But was the Indic state primarily a 'theatre state'? Since the historical record is so unreliable prior to the coming of Islam, Geertz has attempted to reconstruct the basic Hindu-Buddhist system of Indonesia through a study of Bali in the 19th century. He tries to show how Bali was a 'theatre state' by examining the details of the 'sinking status system' of descent based on quasi-lineages (*dadia*) and the 'politics of irrigation' (*subak*). Geertz writes about the 'myth of the exemplary center' in such a way as to imply that it was not merely an ideological myth central to the culture of Bali but also, in part, a scholarly myth.

Basically Geertz argues that since there was no paramount ruler in Bali there could not have been any 'patrimonial' form of domination. Although the 'justso story' of the founding of Bali in 1343 by Javanese invaders led by Ida Dalam Ketut Kresna Kepakisan may have produced a small-scale replica of the Majapahit *nagara* at Samprangan-Gelgel-Klungkung, there was a rapid fading from view, Geertz argues (1980, p. 15), of a classical model of perfection. While the exemplary centre remained at Klungkung, it had only a ceremonial, 'theatrical' significance.

However, while it is true that 19th century Bali may have been a 'house of cards' in terms of political and economic centralization, that does not mean that the 'patrimonial-prebendal' model is deficient. In a sense, Bali may be the exception that proves the rule! The ecology of the island of Bali alone helps to explain many variations from the Classic States in pre-colonial times. Bali may very well have been 'a ceremonial order of precedence imperfectly impressed upon a band of sovereigns' but that does not indicate that scholars such as Wheatley (1983) are misled when they regard Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Burma, or Bali as an example of 'patrimonialism'

(Geertz 1980, p. 4). There is nothing wrong with Geertz's analysis of the gradual decline of prebendal centralization—mythic or real- but it is wrong to conclude from the Balinese situation *c.* 1860 or 1906 that the 'theatre state' is also characteristic of Classic Indic states (*cf.* Walters 1971).

### *Segmentary States*

If, as Geertz argues, our image of the Hindu-Buddhist state is 'overcentralized' then we have to ask which 'decentralized' model is appropriate. Geertz's 'theatre state' model may be appropriate for Bali in the 19th century, but it is not a general model. Another ideal type model that has sometimes been suggested is Burton Stein's 'segmentary state' (1977), a model derived from work by Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and Fortes in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Interest in British Structural-Functionalist work in Africa has been increased by Meillassoux's work (1964), with its impact on Marxist anthropology (Kahn 1981a).

The 'liberal anthropological' view of segmentary society is that the lineage organizes all aspects of a tribal society.

For some of the British anthropologists, particularly in their work on what they came to call African segmentary societies, kinship appears as the key to an understanding of the whole social structure, since it is the segmentary lineage which appears to organize the economy, the political system and the ideology (Kahn 1981a, p. 73).

It is clear that Java was not a 'segmentary society' in this Structural-Functionalist sense, at least not since the 8th century.<sup>7</sup> The Hindu-Buddhist state is not a tribal, lineage-based system. However, the concept of 'segmentary state' can be widened, as it has been by Stein (1977), in his analysis of the Chola kingdom of South India (*c.* 846–1279 CE). If the Chola kingdom was a simple 'segmentary state' in the British anthropological sense, then it is particularly damning to the thesis that pre-colonial Java was patrimonial-prebendal rather than segmentary, because it is likely that the Hindu-Buddhist ideology of Chola may have influenced Java. However, a careful reading of Stein indicates that he actually uses the anthropological term in a completely different sense from that originally intended. The Chola kingdom was not a tribal kingdom in which the simple segmentary lineage is determinative.

It is evident that brahmanically consecrated kingship was a cornerstone of the Chola system. Caste, rather than tribe, was the keystone to pre-Buddhist dharmic kingship.<sup>8</sup> While caste does tend to create segmentation, the anthropological concept of the simple segmentary system is clearly over-extended by Stein. He even suggests that 'clumsy terms like feudalism' could be dropped in favour of his very broad use of the term 'segmentary'. Most of the factual material Stein presents on Chola's compound, polysegmental structure can easily be incorporated into the patrimonial ideal type model.

The neo-Marxist use of the concept is somewhat different, however, since Kahn points out (1976) that 'what appears to be an isolated segmentary society' (e.g. the Minangkabau of West Sumatra) can in fact be 'the product of a particular form of Dutch colonialism, and not a pre-capitalist survival at all.' The Marxian concept of the 'lineage mode of production' encompasses horticultural societies with complex relations of production and modes of distribution.

The main argument against the application of this version of the segmentary model seems to be that the situation in Java in the 19th century is not a matter of the survival of a tribal-like group, such as the Minangkabau, but rather the continued existence of a complex social, politically important structure which is not divided into tribal lineages at all. There simply are no simple 'segments' in 19th century Java; lineage is much less important than 'class'. Kinship ties continue to be important, of course, but they do not determine relations of production to the extent that prestige differences between 'prebendal' officials (*prijaji*) and producers (*petani*) do. I would agree with Terray (quoted by Kahn 1981 a, p. 69) that if we were to impute class antagonisms to lineage formations the concept of class would lose all power to discriminate between societies. Again, we would have broadened the British anthropological concept of the segmentary system to the point where its usefulness would have diminished considerably.

### *Patrimonialism*

The Weberian ideal type model of patrimonial-prebendalism more closely approximates the pre-colonial Indic civilizations of Southeast Asia than any of the other models listed above. The pre-colonial situation in Java can be understood in ideal typical terms as an oscillation between the centripetal forces of the 'patrimonial-prebendal' structure and ideology, on the one hand, and the incipient 'patrimonial-feudal' forces of regional dissent and conflicting claims to legitimacy. Ideological legitimacy was always sought within a basically 'patrimonial-prebendal' model and when the patrimonial ruler was overthrown the new ruler continued to rule through prebendal rather than feudal structures. Most of the Hindu-Buddhist states of Southeast Asia tended to rely heavily on an ideology based on the concept of the *dhamma-raja* (*dharma-raja*), the 'wheel-turning emperor', the divine ruler, who stood at the apex of the microcosm (Tambiah 1976).

The Weberian ideal type model of 'patrimonial-prebendalism' fills a gap in our knowledge. There is a family resemblance among the Burmese, Thai, Cambodian, Javanese, and Balinese cases which is captured by Weber's model. Hindu-Buddhist state forms are quite diverse, of course, but in comparative, macrosociological terms there is an underlying structural similarity (Stcherbatsky 1923) that is due to similar relations of production in societies characterized by irrigated rice agriculture, trade centres, commercial, craft and artisan groups, and long-distance trade in metal goods and luxuries (Tambiah 1976, p. 69).

The patrimonial ruler of Java in the 19th century was the King of the Netherlands, as represented by the Governor-General. The king was also a leader of the mercantilist

faction and a major stockholder in the NHM (*Nederlandse Handel Maatschappij*, Netherlands Trading Company). The Governor-General was treated very much like a maharaja in Java. Nominally, of course, the rulers of Jogjakarta and Surakarta were still in control (Selosoemardjan 1962) and for many of the direct producers it must have seemed that there had been no change in rulership at all. The 'native' and 'European' officials were directly controlled by the Governor-General. Thus, for example, Javanese regents were sometimes banished by the Governor-General. Dutch officials came to Java, worked there and in other parts of the archipelago for several decades, and then returned to the Netherlands to retire. Decision-making was not entirely *ad hoc*, but the decrees of the Governor-General were the law. There was no parliamentary system. Administrative codes were established, but they could easily be overturned by decree (Zwart 1939). In essence the whole of Java was owned by the colonial government, with a few exceptions that stemmed from land sales during the British interregnum (1811–16) and at other times. 'Up to the passage of the Agrarian Land Law of 1870 land in Java fell under *de facto* state control (Reinsma 1955, 1959). The so-called preservation of 'native' land rights meant only that peasants retained some control of subsistence land' (Kahn 1981b, p. 192). Villages were collectively liable for forced deliveries and forced labour. The situation in Java mid-century was basically 'patrimonial-prebendal', but with a relatively superficial layer of 'rational-legal' administration. Since the applicability of Weber's model to Java is explored in more detail elsewhere (Bakker 1979, 1987), this chapter focuses on the comparison of the applicability of Weber's ideal type model relative to other suggested models (see Eisenstadt 1973). Some of the implications of the Weberian model for the continued existence of servile labour in the mid-19th century will help to illustrate the heuristic value of the patrimonial-prebendal model.

### Servile labour

There is no doubt that the accumulation of constant capital in Java in the 19th century depended on exploitation of servile labour (Soest 1869–71) through forced deliveries and forced labour. The internal labour market was not interrelated with the external market. Outside a few sugar factories and parts of some towns there was no free wage labour. Even after the Agrarian Law of 1870 had been passed it took a relatively long time for the transition from servile labour to free wage labour to take place on Java. It took even longer on the Outer Islands. The cultivators were not able to sell their labour; it was appropriated. They were not 'peasants', in the strict sense of 'petty commodity producers'. Nor were they free wage labourers. The average householder worked because he was forced to do so, both by the necessity of subsistence and by the various manifestations of indirect rule.

There were basically five types of servile labour obligation:

- (a) tribute,
- (b) penal,
- (c) 'cooperative',



- (d) cultivation, and
- (e) seigneurial.

In general, those servile labour obligations were oppressive for the 'little man' (*wong tjilik*). The cultivator had few, if any, possessions and was close to subsistence, tending perhaps 0.25 ha of land, or less. The amount of time and energy required to fulfil servile labour obligations often made life difficult. Labour duties were a regressive form of 'taxation' (in the loose sense), especially in areas where the 'crop payments' (i.e. colonial government's payment for crops) were low relative to the land rent' assessment. When new crops were being introduced in the 1830s in Java there were many instances of hardship, due in part to the cumulative effect of servile labour obligations, crop failures, soil depletion (e. g. indigo in Cheribon regency), and poor transportation facilities (Day 1966). Some of the abuses of the cultivation system were ironed out in the course of the 1830s and 1840s, but the structural aspects of servile labour remained relatively more oppressive than prior to 1830. Whereas traditional servile labour obligations had existed even in precolonial times, it was the 'rational-bureaucratic' layer of colonial government that made servile labour a rigorous, systematic duty.

Cultivation services were invented by Governor-General Johannes van den Bosch. The roots of the system originated in exploitation by the Netherlands East Indies Company (VOC, *Verenigde Oost-Indie Compagnie*) of parts of western Java, particularly the Preanger highlands (*Priangan*, *Preanger regenschappen*). The VOC had extrapolated, in turn, from the assumed 'traditional' servile labour pattern. However, forced cultivation does not seem to have been systematically directed to cultivation of export crops in precolonial times (Filet 1895). Cultivation for export to European markets was never part of the tributary structure of relations of production in pre-colonial Java, of course. Hence, van den Bosch's cultivation system tied a larger proportion of the indigenous population to a 'European world system', without, however, making the people into peasants or free wage labourers.

The cultivator was given an option, at least in theory, between paying traditional tribute, undertaking to cultivate export crops on one-fifth of his fields, or working 66 days a year on government-owned estates or projects. In practice there was little or no choice. Sometimes cultivators (*petani*) had to grow cultivation crops such as sugar cane and *also* contribute compulsory labour services on government-estates, such as tea plantations. The basic principle of cultivation services as a type of servile labour obligation was that tribute was paid in kind (i.e. cultivation crops chosen by the colonial government). Such cultivation services (*kultuurdiensten*) had never existed in the precolonial tributary structure, but those members of the Dutch mercantilist élite in the Netherlands who advocated the cultivation system (e.g. King Willem I) were persuaded by van den Bosch to regard cultivation services as merely an aspect of traditional labour obligations. The most significant export crop initially was coffee, both in Java and Sumatra. In the 1840s sugar production became relatively more important than coffee in Java, both in terms of total tonnage and total value. Coffee remained significant in West Sumatra, as well as Java and North Sulawesi. Local

officials were allowed 'procentos' as an intensification measure; such percentages were effective incentives (Reinsma 1959).

While 'liberal' opponents of the cultivation system argued that the cultivation system was oppressive (Welderden 1948), much of their rhetoric can be traced to bias due to their desire to open up investment by that 'fraction' of the bourgeoisie that was not in power. The general effect on the peasantry, especially after 1834–35, does not seem to have been quite as black as polemical writers in the Netherlands tended to argue (Robijns 1967). The wealthy cultivators (*sikep*) were most likely to benefit, especially when the prices paid for government crops were relatively advantageous; but, the landless *petani* (the *menumpang*) sometimes also benefited, due to the need for their labour. (The land use rights also entailed customary obligations (Vollenhoven 1918–33, 1928). Therefore, landless people were given certain rights when there were not enough full members of the village to fulfil the increased work load for which the village community was collectively liable (Bakker 1983). In some respects the cultivation system can actually be considered a wise 'development' policy, since it allowed for expansion of production without 'proletarianization'. However, there were abuses and some people suffered hardships that they would not have suffered had no colonial power intervened.

Cultivation services (*kultuurdiensten*) were only a part of the total package (see Geertz 1960, Bakker 1987) discussed in the literature on the cultivation system (*kultuurstelsel*, often translated culture system) in the Netherlands East Indies (Furnivall 1941, 1944, 1948, Fasseur 1975, Van Niel 1972, Bakker 1979). Seigneurial services were sometimes a particularly oppressive aspect of servile labour and there has been no thorough study of penal services (*Kerjaan paksa*), which often involved harsh penalties such as banishment, whipping, branding, and chaining for relatively minor offences. The cultivation system as a whole was oppressive and exploitative; but the most significant aspect of it economically, cultivation services, cannot immediately be considered worse than the realistically possible alternatives (i.e. pre-colonial tribute or some form of free labour such as petty commodity production or wage labour).

Cultivation services in 19th century Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi were quite diverse in their impact. Cultivators mainly concerned with coffee production were, on the whole, in a quite different circumstance than *petani* who were charged with cultivation of cinchona trees or indigo plants. Geertz's analysis of the impact of the cultivation system on Javanese people tends to emphasize sugar cultivation on rice paddy lands (*sawah*) and to ignore the complex regional variations which historians have analysed in some detail (Van Niel 1969, Fasseur 1977, Kartodirdjo 1966). A detailed, historically based study of the cultivation system as a whole has yet to be written.

We do not know exactly how the transition from servile labour to free labour took place. But, lacking detailed idiographic work, we can conjecture that the Agrarian Law of 1870 had a significant impact. The NHM, for example, started to turn to the financing of private enterprise, in the form of long-term loans to owners of small-scale private estate plantations. Previously the NHM had been the principal financier of the cultivation system. 'On private plantations and in privately-owned factories servile labor gave way', Kahn writes (1981b, pp. 194–5), 'first to contract and indentured

labour and then, by 1930, to “free” wage labor.’ It was the period 1870 to 1930 that most probably conforms in key ways to the ideal type of ‘*Gutsherrschaft*’ rather than, as Kahn argues, the earlier cultivation system period (1830–70), which Engels considered (in 1883) a form of ‘state socialism’ (Engels 1975, p. 450). During the cultivation system period the labour situation was servile but not ‘traditional’, while in the subsequent periods true free wage labour emerged only very slowly and in selected locations. Java was never as ‘proletarianized’ as some other colonies, which is actually the positive feature of ‘involution’ and ‘shared poverty’. A complex, mixed pattern existed, but it was not capitalist.

### Peripheralization?

Kahn (1981b, p. 198) defines ‘peripheralization’ as a process of subsumption which can best be seen as ‘a tendency for enterprises to emerge to which peasant producers are tied directly’. The labour force is held ‘immobile’, or, at least, the colonial government *attempts* to create an immobile labour force. That attempt was particularly successful during the cultivation system period in Java. Peripheral organization cannot be understood simply as a function of the historical evolution of a capitalist world system. What happens in the periphery is definitely the outcome of specific relations of production which have to do with ‘class’ in the broad sense (i.e. also encompassing pre-capitalist formations).

Class conflict in the Netherlands in the 19th century basically involved the struggle of the ‘liberal’ faction of the bourgeoisie to acquire control and change the way in which the Netherlands East Indies (and other colonies) could be exploited (Fasseur 1975). The ‘conservative’ faction in the Netherlands was mercantilist in its outlook (Westendorp 1950a, 1950b). It retained hegemony until 1848 and then started to lose its tight hold on colonial policy. A royal Commission for Constitutional Reform was instituted under Thorbecke and a new Constitution was promulgated on 3 November 1848. Ministers became responsible to parliament (*Staten Generaal*) and the lower house (*Tweede Kamer*) was directly elected by popular vote. The right of personal rule over the colonies by the king was removed. The gradual evolution of a more ‘liberal’, *laissez-faire* approach to colonial exploitation, as symbolized by Royal Decree of 20 July 1870, No. 15 (i.e. the Agrarian Law), became more or less inevitable; but, there was still considerable opposition from mercantilist-oriented members of the Dutch bourgeoisie.

The ‘class’ situation in Java was both more complex and much simpler than in the Netherlands. Since there was very little free wage labour in Java in the 19th century and no true ‘peasant’ population of petty commodity producers, most of the people were cultivators or fishermen. The élite consisted of a class of prebendal officials, some of whom were of aristocratic lineage but many of whom were descendants of pre-capitalist officials. This *prijaji* élite was manipulated by the Netherlands East Indies colonial government. A complex, European-style ‘rational-legal bureaucratic’ structure was set up consisting of parallel offices, with Javan ‘native officials’ (*Inlandsch Bestur*) considered the ‘younger brothers’ of the ‘European’ officials

**Table 16.1** Organizational chart: administrative structure in Java c. 1850 Joint *Bestuur ter Plaatse*: administration, supra-village sphere

Level of jurisdiction (government lands)	'Native' officials ( <i>Inlandsch Bestuur</i> )	'European officials ( <i>Binnenlandsch Bestuur</i> )
<i>pulau</i> Java, as a whole		Governor-General & <i>Raad</i> (Council)
residency		resident
regency (= <i>kabupaten</i> )	regent (= <i>bupati</i> ) <i>patih, jaksa</i> <i>kluwon, carik, etc.</i>	assistant resident
<i>afdeeling</i> district	<i>wedono</i> <i>assisten-wedono</i>	<i>controleur</i> <i>onder-controleur</i> ( <i>der 2e klasse</i> ) & <i>adspirant controleur</i>
<i>onder-(sub) district</i>	<i>mantri, bekel, carik, etc.</i>	
The village cluster ( <i>desa</i> ) level		
<i>desa (dessa)</i>	<i>petinggi</i> (or, = <i>lurah, koewoe, djaro, etc.</i> )	—
kampoeng (kampong, negri)	kamitoewa, kapetengans, kabajans, carik, and <i>modin, etc.</i>	

Source: Interpretation of text, article on 'Bestuur' (administration) in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch Indie*, vol. I, pp. 279–88. Also, for the gradations within the regent group (Raden, Raden Adipati, etc.) see the summary by Berg (1902). Compare Boechari (1963). Note that *desa*-level 'administrators' are not a part of the *Indlansch Bestuur* in the strict sense. The Director of Cultivations is not listed because he does not administer a particular jurisdiction.

(*Binnenlandsch Bestuur*) (Table 16.1). Younger brothers deferred to their older brothers. That is, it was a system of indirect rule.

Below the 'supra-village' colonial administration was the 'village' sphere. The 'village cluster' (*desa*) consisted of many 'hamlets' (*kampoeng*). In such hamlets there were cultivators who had a full share of so-called 'customary' (*adat*) land use rights and they were called by various names in different regions (e.g. *sikep*). There were also half-share, quarter-share, and other fractional shareholders, somewhat akin to the English medieval *Hide* or the German *Mark* (Weber 1981, pp. 3–25). Then there were the landless (sometimes called *menumpang*), who lived on the outskirts of the hamlet and had no customary use rights. They had sometimes migrated to the hamlet from their own traditional hamlet due to floods, disease, or war. They worked for the shareholders and received payment in kind. It is this group of landless cultivators that

benefited, to a certain extent, from the servile labour arrangements of the cultivation system, since the customary system of village liability meant that land-holders (i.e. those who had customary use of the land, usually *sawah*) had to share some of that land in order to lighten their own burden of work. As the demand for production of export crops increased, the demand for labour in many hamlets increased and previously landless people were included to a greater extent than they had been in *adat* rights.

In addition to government cultivations there were also private cultivations of some commodities such as coffee (*bevolkingskoffie-kultuur*), and those cultivations probably had some positive impact in providing the initial basis for expansion of a money economy, even at government-controlled prices. The complexity of the situation underlines Kahn's statement (1981b, p. 204) that 'A theory of pre-capitalist accumulation has unfortunately not been adequately developed.' The pre-capitalist forms found in Java in the mid-19th century were influenced by Dutch mercantilist interests, but not always in ways that could be easily predicted, even with detailed knowledge of traditional relations of production. No 'functionalist' assumptions about the workings of the capitalist world system can predict the specific 'class' structure of 19th century Java, Sumatra, or Sulawesi. Failure to distinguish between different levels of 'class' phenomena leads to simplistic generalizations and assumes a relationship between 'centre' and 'periphery' that can only be a very rough initial working hypothesis. However, some initial hypotheses are needed and sociological understanding will require successive approximations to the 'truth' of the matter.

### World economy and patrimonialism

During the 19th century the European world economy<sup>9</sup> was slowly being formed and, in the absence of free wage labour or petty commodity production in Java, the direct producer was bound to the Dutch mercantilist bourgeoisie through a modified 'traditional' tributary-type mode of production. The process of peripheralization cannot be explained simply as a result of the working of external forces, but must take into account the internal dynamics of Javan societies (i.e. Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese). In Java the producers were 'immobilized' by the system of colonial indirect rule that utilized a 'prebendal' status group or 'class' to administer forced cultivation of export crops through servile labour. One important feature of the cultivation system, for example, was the use of 'passports' (*passenstelsel*) that severely restricted geographical mobility. Cultivators could not travel from one hamlet to another without the permission of the head of the village cluster (*kepala desa*). People simply could not get around without circumventing the system. Anyone found outside his own village cluster without a 'pass' was subject to severe penalties, especially in situations labelled 'revolt' or 'insurrection' (Kartodirdjo 1973).

Not only were direct producers tied to the system, the various layers of 'tax farmers' were also unable to escape from the logic of mercantilist control of the economy. The Javan élite did not make a transition from aristocratic landholders to bourgeois capitalists because the true aristocracy (*pribadi*, members of the *kraton*, or patrimonial

court) were either eliminated (e.g. after the Java War of 1825–30) or co-opted as ‘officials’ (prebendal functionaries, such as *bupatis*, regents). After 1830 the ‘rulers’ of Java were as much under the control of the ‘Dutch’ as the direct producers were. The *prijaji* gradually became the servants and sometimes puppets of a colonial government premised on indirect rule.

### Java and Japan

But what if Java had not been patrimonial in pre-colonial times? Would it have made any difference? To answer that question fully would require another paper, but an initial answer can be suggested by a re-examination of Geertz’s comparison between Java and Japan. Hall (1970) has argued that Japan can be characterized as ‘feudal’ during a significant part of its history. Hall & Jansen (1968) have developed that argument historically. Today it is commonly accepted that Japan, of all the countries of the world, comes closest to having had a European-style ‘feudal’ structure. Hence, the comparison made by Gertz (1963, pp. 130–43) could usefully incorporate the question: ‘Is there any difference in the effects of the penetration of European world capitalist relations of production between a country that is basically “patrimonial” and a country that is significantly “feudal”?’ Geertz confines himself to ecological considerations such as population—which must certainly be taken into account—but the political economy of Java must also be considered. The Dutch government was able to manipulate traditional patrimonial-prebendal aspects of Java’s precolonial and early colonial political economy while Japan remained secluded from the European world economy. When Japan did become part of the world system (after Perry’s visit in 1853 and particularly after the Meiji Restoration in 1868) it had a strong, indigenous élite, based on a heritage of feudal, aristocratic land-holders. Java never had a feudal aristocracy (in the European sense) and the court royalty was effectively blocked by the Java War.

Despite its entry into the European world economy much later, Japan developed a true peasantry much earlier than Java. In Japan the process of proletarianization and urbanization also proceeded more rapidly. As Geertz points out (1963, p. 142):

The Japanese peasant had to go to town and become a full-time reasonably disciplined member of a manufacturing system.... The Javanese peasant did not, literally, even have to move from his rice terrace (*sawah*).

One therefore has to agree with Geertz’s conclusion (1963, p. 143, emphasis added):

The real tragedy of colonial history in Java after 1830 is not that the peasantry suffered. It suffered much worse elsewhere, and, if one surveys the miseries of the submerged classes of the nineteenth century generally, it may even seem to have gotten off relatively lightly. *The tragedy is that it suffered for nothing.*

But the reason that direct producers in Java (and other parts of the archipelago) 'suffered for nothing' has to do not only with ecological factors and colonialism *per se*—as important as those factors are—but also with the general structure of traditional and colonial political economy. This general structure has to do with external and internal factors. Externally it is related to the long continuation of a mercantilist élite in the Netherlands and internally the utilization of patrimonial-prebendal relations of production, distribution, and exchange by the colonial system of indirect rule and forced cultivation. After the liberal bourgeoisie gained more power in the Netherlands a layer of *laissez-faire* capitalism did get established in Java, but the earlier mercantilist-inspired strengthening of a caricature of pre-colonial society also remained. Hence, a 'dualist' situation arose in Java, and in the archipelago generally.

### Conclusion

The comparative study of pre-capitalist relations of production requires continued examination of the Javanese case, both in terms of historically specific idiographic detail and in light of sociological and anthropological theoretical ideal types and models. Particularly important are the implications of the servile labour system in Java during the cultivation system period (1830–70), as well as analysis of the transitions which occurred after 1870. The 'agrarian question' for Java (and other regions in Indonesia) constitutes a chapter in a larger debate concerning the nature of agrarian transformation and 'development', as Kahn (1985, p. 75) correctly points out. But that larger debate is not merely a matter of 'positivist' versus 'interpretative' or 'objectivist' versus 'historicist' paradigmatic approaches to the evidence. Geertz's interpretative, historicist approach, for example, is biased towards ecological variables and 'thick description', but can neither be simply brushed off as mere 'ethnography' nor fully accepted as a definitive summary of even one aspect of mid-19th century Javan history. Kahn is right when he argues that the anti-involution literature often misses the point, but he is incorrect to imply that the 'deconstructionist' position in the debate concerning whether rural producers are: (a) petty commodity producers (i.e. small-scale capitalists), (b) free wage labourers (i.e. disguised proletarians), or (c) simply pre-capitalist direct producers, is a question of 'historicist' versus 'positivist' approaches to the transformation, or lack of transformation, of agrarian structure.

Weber's comparative, historical sociology attempts to overcome the arbitrary division between positivist, 'causal' analysis and historicist, 'interpretative' understanding. The Weberian perspective that has guided my analysis of 'patrimonialism' and its impact on 'development' in Java has been both causal and interpretative. As stated above, Weber is viewed here as less interested in 'superstructure' than in the analysis of 'class', broadly conceived. Weber developed his main insights concerning class in his critical debate with the legacy of Marx, including his analysis of the agrarian question in Germany (Weber 1958a), which was in part an answer to Kautsky's analysis of the same question. As Zeitlin (1981, p. 159)

states: 'Weber's highly sophisticated discussion [of class] can be regarded as an attempt to complete Marx's final chapter [of *Capital*, Vol. III] in the light of twentieth century conditions.' Weber can also be viewed as contributing to the further specification of Marx's analysis of relations of production in pre-capitalist societies in the light of conditions after Marx's death (Seddon 1978).

Weber's ideal type of 'patrimonial-prebendalism' should not merely be considered a model of political domination. It should also be seen as a model of the specific form which one major type of tributary mode of production exhibited in Indic societies such as Java (Schrieke 1955, 1957). The relations of production implicit in the Hindu-Buddhist state systems of Funan, Champa, Pagan, Kambuja, Srivijaya, Majapahit, and Bali in the pre-colonial period are very important to understand if we are going to assess the relative impact of various types of colonialism on subsequent 'development' in Southeast Asia. While an ideal type model can only serve as the beginning of enquiry and does not constitute the final end of scholarly investigation, nevertheless it is important to choose a model which will tend to promote investigation of specific classes and their inter-relations (Roth 1968). The particular form of colonial exploitation which existed in Java c. 1830–70 benefited a fraction of the dominant, mercantilist group in the Netherlands and existed despite contradictions with the general trend of capitalist penetration. Servile labour (forced deliveries and forced labour) was the basis of the cultivation system, and the particular form that servile labour took in Java had as much to do with precapitalist 'patrimonial-prebendal' structures as it had to do with mercantile capitalism. The debate on the agrarian question in Indonesia, far from being over, has just barely begun, despite the enormous literature on Geertz's involution thesis (Geertz 1984), on historical aspects of Dutch colonialism, and on 'the development of underdevelopment'. A Weberian interpretation of '*nagara*' as a 'patrimonial-prebendal' structure will contribute greatly to further analysis and understanding of the formation of classes and the impact of the European world system. Eventually a more complete answer to the question of why the 'little man' in Java 'suffered for nothing' will be worked out.

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### Notes

- 1 Schumpeter classifies Weber as a member of the 'Youngest' Historical School, along with Arthur Spiethoff and Werner Sombart. Collins (1986, pp. 117–42) provides an interesting analysis of the intellectual parallels between Weber and Schumpeter. Both writers were influenced by Marxian economics.



- 2 The *Methodenstreit* in Europe at the turn of the century is the basic root of distinction between 'idiographic' and 'nomothetic' approaches. Weber's comparative, historical sociology attempts to bridge historicism and positivism, hence '*verstehende soziologie*', a combination of interpretive *Verstehen* and causal '*sociologie*'.
- 3 Professor Ernest LeVos called my attention to Paul Wheatley's important contribution (pers. comm. 3 February 1987).
- 4 Professor Wertheim first mentioned J.C. van Leur's use of Weber's concept of patrimonialism to me in a private conversation, 23 May 1978, in Guelph.
- 5 Reading Professor Bendix's discussion of Weber's concept of patrimonialism (1962, pp. 334–84) was my first introduction to the concept, long before I had read *Economy and society*, or thought of studying Dutch colonialism in the Netherlands East Indies.
- 6 The concept of 'segmentary state' originates with Emile Durkheim's *Division of labor in society* (1893/1964), which makes a bipolar distinction between 'mechanical' and 'organic' solidarity. The simplest unit, for Durkheim, was the completely unsegmented 'horde'. Durkheim's classification continues with 'simple polysegmental societies', 'polysegmental societies simply compounded', and 'polysegmental societies doubly compounded'. More complex than the 'horde' is the 'clan', and then a 'segmental society with a clan base'. 'We say of these societies that they are segmental in order to indicate their formation by the repetition of like aggregates in them, analogous to the rings of an earthworm...' (Durkheim 1964, pp. 175). See also Southall (1956).
- 7 Clans such as the Licchavis, Sakyas, Mallas, and Bhaggas in the time of Siddhartha Gautama were probably 'segmentary states' and the powerful new rulers of Magadha, Kosala, Kosambi, and Ujjeni followed a pattern which is 'poly-segmental' and 'compounded'. Then many segments are joined in a mandala-type structure which is like a 'tribal confederacy'. The later Asokan 'paternal despotism' and 'centralized, non-federal empire' (reigned 274–232 BCE) is a further extra polation and resembles the basic 'patrimonial-prebendal' model (Tambiah 1976, pp. 48, 70–2).
- 8 The basis of the *cakkavati* (Sanskrit *chakravartin*) 'world conqueror' model of dharmic kingship in earlier Buddhist thought and in Asokan edicts is discussed by Tambiah (1976). He made it clear that Buddhism was in some respects a direct response to brahmanical notions of political and economic organization. 'Kingship' was the articulating principle of Buddhism. The 'patrimonial ruler' is the 'fountainhead' of society. The real thrust of the Buddhist story is that it is self-consciously *an inversion of the Vedic theory* of the origin of the varna...in the Buddhist myth we find that social order—indeed society—occurs together with and as a result of the institution of kingship by the voluntary acts of men...the dharma of kingship becomes the encompassing code that reigns over society cum political economy, which are not separable' (Tambiah 1976, p. 22, emphasis added).
- 9 The term 'European world economy' is preferable to 'world system' because of the association of the term 'world system' with the specific assumptions of Wallerstein's paradigm, or 'world systems theory' (WST). Elsewhere I have argued (Bakker 1985) that what is valuable in WST is comparative, historically based sociology.

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*Legacies of empire: political centralization and  
class formation in the Hispanic-American  
world*

JOHN GLEDHILL

**The Spanish conquest as a disjunction in New World history**

It is a commonplace to observe that the Aztec and Inca empires were rapidly overthrown by astonishingly small bands of Spanish *conquistadores*. But the *consolidation* of the Hispanic empire in the New World involved considerably greater manpower and considerably greater indigenous resistance. The favourable initial conjuncture does not provide a real index of what was ultimately involved in the conquest of the aboriginal societies of the Americas, as distinct from their imperial superstructures. Colonial society did not begin to 'crystallize' into a (relatively) stable form anywhere until the 17th century. This process of post-conquest transformation reflected the interplay of two sets of contradictions: those arising from the relationship between imperial state and class power in the Spanish sector, and those arising from the complex web of relations linking the aboriginal populations to their conquerors.

Post-conquest social formations evolved along rather different lines in different regions: even in the heartlands of pre-Hispanic civilization developments were not uniform. The differences reflect ecology (and ethno-ecology), the social and cultural patterns of the pre-Hispanic period, differences in the internal development of the colonial economies and their articulation to the world-market, and the rôle of the non-aboriginal segments of the colonial populations in the emergent social configurations that developed in the territorial spaces which became separate 'national' political units after Independence. Thus, for example, *Repartimientos*, a tributary form of colonial exploitation discussed in more detail below, remained the dominant form of surplus extraction in the Yucatan for well over a century after they had ceased to be significant in central Mexico, and it was not until the late 18th century that there was a significant development of landed estates (*haciendas*) in the Yucatec Maya region (Farriss 1983). For many purposes, differences between regions and their relationship to the class structures which have emerged over the long term within particular Latin American nation-states are of the essence (Smith 1984). Indeed, as I argue here and elsewhere (Gledhill 1987), divergences in 'national' trajectories in the 19th and 20th centuries reflect the way different regions interact historically within larger configurations.



Nevertheless, it remains desirable to begin by considering some general features of this colonial world.

If we compare the Americas under Spanish rule with the pre-Hispanic period, it seems undeniable that radically new types of class relationships emerged. To the extent that this was associated with the development of European commerce and property relationships, it might be argued that the 'market-orientation' of central Mexican aboriginal societies implied that less of a transformation occurred in this context than in Highland Peru. But it would be unwise to draw such a conclusion, since trade, market exchange, and property relations in aboriginal Mesoamerica need to be placed into the context of the total sociocultural system in which they were embedded (Gledhill 1988). Nor does the fact that aboriginal populations were drawn into participation in commodity relationships necessarily imply that they were also drawn into acceptance of the possessive individualism and forms of commodity fetishism characteristic of occidental life (Taussig 1980; Gose 1986). Furthermore, an emphasis on the transformations wrought by Spanish mercantile economy and commodity relationships can easily overwhelm consideration of other dimensions of the Spanish colonial regime.

Spain was itself a social formation in transition, first from feudalism to Absolutism at the start of the colonial period, and subsequently, under the Bourbons, towards a more rationalized national state form in response to the pressure created by the hegemony of north-west Europe. The limited scope and success of the Bourbon reforms, and the conservative reaction which occurred in the colonies after the subsequent triumph of liberalism in the metropolis, led to aggravated pressure for change, under different ideological and social auspices, in the post-Independence period (Gledhill 1987). The assimilation of new ideologies, especially those whose starting point was the French and American revolutions, did not, of course, correspond to a real replication of the social transformations which underlay those ideologies in their homelands. The external context of 'nation-building' in the Americas, capitalist industrialization in the 'core' of the European world economy, followed by capitalist imperialism, played a fundamental rôle in shaping emergent class structures. Local ideological trends responded in part to the effects of 'capitalist modernization' as it was actually experienced in these regions. The rise of *Indigenismo*, for example, largely served the ends of a white 'middle class' nationalism which had little real contact with the peasant social realities on which it was purportedly based (Yambert 1982).

It goes without saying that 16th century Spain was a society founded on hierarchy and status. Yet this simple observation is not sufficient to locate its colonial social formation in a comparative framework. In 16th century Spain, the formal system of aristocratic status ranking was becoming increasingly rigid; yet the cutting-edge of colonial expansion was precisely the possibility of acquiring *hidalgo* status by accumulating wealth—through plunder or trade.

Even the greatest of Noble Houses invested in the enterprise of colonialism, whilst mercantile wealth accumulation was a route to advancement for those lower on the ladder. For Wallerstein, the consolidation of a European world economy transformed aristocratic wealth accumulation, entailing a 'deepstructural' transition to capitalist

class structure, despite the continuing conflicts between 'status' aristocracy and 'bourgeoisie' (Wallerstein 1980, pp. 119–25). Though this argument may overstate the rôle of the 'world economy' in developments whose roots might be better located in the extreme politicoeconomic decentralization of European medieval society (Gledhill 1987), it is important to emphasize that the Spanish imperial state, like all European states, had to contend with a 'dominant class' which was heavily committed to the extension of its claims to private proprietary wealth.

On the other hand, though the multicentric system of national states and mercantilism of the European arena may have presaged a new epoch, the view from within the Spanish empire itself might not appear terribly novel in comparison with other imperial formations. Nor was Spain the only European state in the 17th century to make public office a basis for private enrichment, and in which status barriers continued to influence life chances. But from the perspective of transformation within New World civilization, the conquest and incorporation of the aboriginal populations of the New World led to a status 'rigidity' of a new kind: a system of ranked social categories based on considerations of race and blood, founded in an absolute disjunction in the gradations of hierarchy which separated those subjects of the state who were *gente de razón* from those who were not. The 'Indians' of the New World were a creation of Spanish colonialism, and in this exclusionary classification of humanity and its irreducible premises was created a social gulf between the colonizers and colonized which was deepened rather than moderated over time (Cotler 1979; Spalding 1984).

It is true that many individuals could and did 'pass' from one social sector to another, though this process had to be cognized in terms of biological transition: *mestizaje*. In particular regions, such as the Mexican Bajío, such 'passing' was the rule rather than the exception. 'Indians' colonized the Bajío spontaneously, but were initially installed in corporate communities by the Crown: by the end of the 18th century, most had disappeared into the ranks of 'mestizo' hacienda peones and miners. Even those who retained the legal status of Indian tributaries mostly paid as individuals or through their *patrones* rather than through their communities: more than two-thirds of them were classified as *vagos*, with ties to neither village nor hacienda (Brading 1978, pp. 18–19, Wolf 1955). In the Andes, too, many 'Indians' were to choose the path of becoming *forasteros*, community-less 'aliens' in their own land. But what differentiated a region such as the Bajío in the 18th century, where the dominant tendency was for Indians to 'disappear' into mestizo society, from many other regions of colonial Mexico, was its combination of mining, commercial agricultural, and urban artisan industry: a region of frontier colonization and economic expansion, labour was scarce and wages relatively high until the late 18th century. The use of forced labour in the Bajío silver mines was abandoned early in the 17th century. The structuring of social relations gravitated around the competition for labour between mine-owners, *hacendados*, and urban entrepreneurs (Gledhill 1981).

In the regions of Mexico which had dense pre-conquest populations and different colonial political economies, such as Yucatan or Chiapas, the tendency was to preserve 'Indian' ethnic identity within the framework of the corporate community. Wasserstrom comments on this situation as follows:

...it must be remembered that colonial society brought Spaniards and Indians together not simply as distinct ethnic groups but as members of antagonistic social classes—that ethnic relations quickly became a pretense for perpetuating inequalities and injustices of a much more familiar sort. Then, too, the options of emigration and transculturation, of *mestizaje*, which many chose to pursue, remained open to Indians in most parts of Mexico and Central America. But in Chiapas at least, a significant number of these men and women chose instead to modify their beliefs and customs and traditions in every way possible so as to avoid the one fate they evidently feared most: the loss of their right to be *naturales*...ethnic diversity did not emerge with the appearance of class society, much less with the advent of colonialism...native people quite reasonably rejected transculturation as a solution to those problems of inequality and exploitation which plagued them: why, they asked, should we forsake the little we have salvaged to enter the lowest levels of ladino society? (Wasserstrom 1983b, p. 119).

In Chiapas and similar contexts, the preservation of 'ethnic' identity and community solidarity must be seen as a reconstitution of identity rather than as a simple conservation of primordial forms. It was also an active strategy on the part of the victims of an exploitative society, a strategy of 'resistance', albeit one which was overdetermined by the colonial system of social domination. But it is vital to recognize that this represented the response of particular groups of Indians in the context of regional political economies in which a change of social identity offered no significant improvement to their conditions of life in terms of their own cultural values. Conditions were not uniform. Furthermore, ethnic class stratification was more than 'a pretense for perpetuating inequalities and injustices'. It was constitutive of the political economy of the colonial state, whose revenues rested on the tribute of the Indian community, as well as the source of a good deal of private wealth accumulation through the injustices perpetrated by the occupants of public office. The freedom to 'pass' into another social sector, to the extent that it was not simply an index of the limitations of Spanish control over the native society it encapsulated, was contingent on the fact that this did not, in practice, constitute a threat to the basic structures of exploitation. The fact that many Indians had their own motives for wishing to retain a specific place in an exploitative colonial society played an important rôle in perpetuating those structures.

The categorization of the colonial population on racial lines was not the whole of the status order. The politics of the first phase of the post-colonial era, marked by the struggles between liberal and conservative factions throughout Latin America, were concerned with the abolition of that order in its entirety, and there were, as we will see, huge ironies in the reactions of many Indians to the kind of 'emancipation' offered to them by liberalism, one which allowed the unfettered development of 'purer' types of economic class relationships. Yet the relationship between class and status order is more complex than this simple initial statement would suggest. The increasing polarization of the colonial status hierarchy also reflected changing economic

relationships, and, at least in the case of Mexico and Peru, the creole élite's reluctance to sever its links with the imperial metropolis reflected a perceived threat to its class power (Gledhill 1987). Hierarchy in the Spanish colonial order did not simply give way to class, since other forms of social opposition played an important rôle in the politics of the late 19th and 20th centuries. But its form certainly did contribute to a sharpening of oppositions which included a consciousness of class relations at all levels of colonial society.

In order to explore these issues further, we must pay some attention to differing regional patterns and how these relate to general tendencies. Much of the specific historical trajectory of Mexico, for example, might be explained in terms of the contribution to Mexican history made by regions which lay both outside the old highland Mesoamerican 'core', and outside the colonial political centre. The insurgency which the creole élite perceived as a threat to their class power began in the Bajío. The popular rebellion was spearheaded by hacienda tenants, labourers, and urban artisans whose reaction can more easily be seen in terms of class in a European sense in this socially diversified, more 'capitalistic', region, though class conflicts in general remained entangled in the caste order of colonial domination. It would be inadequate to offer an analysis of the revolution of 1910 which ignored the rôle of what Knight (1980) has termed '*serrano*' movements (see below), and the specific contribution of the northern provinces—landowners, aspirant military *caudillos* of petty bourgeois origin, and the military colonists who followed Pancho Villa—though it would be equally inadequate to deny the agrarian aspects of the revolution and the relationship between 'Indianness' and the kind of agrarian social movement represented by the Zapatista phenomenon among the (proletarianized) peasants of Morelos. The 'class threat' posed by the Mexican insurgency of 1810 was not identical with that posed by the danger of a generalized Indian revolt against the tribute system in Peru. The events in Peru which led to the formation of the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) in the northern coastal city of Trujillo—the expansion of foreign capital in the sugar sector and concomitant combination of proletarianization with strangulation of local enterprise in both rural and urban sectors (Klarén 1973)—took place against the backdrop of a total national social configuration which remained distinct from that of Mexico. In the rest of my discussion I will weave together aspects of different regional patterns in order to continue to draw out generalities, without pretending that this procedure is without its drawbacks.

### **Class, state, and conquered in the Americas**

The first system of colonial exploitation, *encomienda*, can be seen with hindsight as something of a stop-gap, though as Spalding (1984) has demonstrated for the Peruvian case, the *encomenderos* themselves consciously argued the case for a seigniorial regime based on decentralization of politico-judicial authority, and the socially heterogeneous opposition to such proposals on the part of the less favoured segments of the colonizing population—priests, merchants, professionals, tradesmen, and settler farmers—was not in itself sufficient to guarantee the centralization brought about by the Toledan reforms. Indeed, there

was a real danger that Philip II's financial difficulties might have led the Crown to grant the *encomenderos* the decentralized juridical rights they demanded, in what virtually became an auction (Spalding 1984, pp, 149–51). Nevertheless, despite the precedent of the *Reconquista*, and the suitability of the *encomienda* system as a mode of consolidating territorial conquest in the short term, the centralizing thrust characteristic of Absolutism in Europe was carried across into the colonial world. The 'New Laws' which reduced *encomenderos* to pensioners of state tribute had already been enacted in Mexico in 1542, and it is unlikely that the greater resistance displayed by the Peruvian *encomenderos* could have been allowed to prevail. The state inserted itself between the new colonial nobility and the Indians, and installed its own civil and religious bureaucracy to regulate the access of the 'private sector' to Indian labour and tribute.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Gledhill 1981, 1985), the type of centralization adopted by the Spanish colonial regime had significant long-term effects on the development of systems of private wealth appropriation. In Mexico, for example, the state's assumption of direct control over the distribution of Indian forced labour set a pattern which, despite myriad regional variations, continued to influence the development of the colonial economy after the consolidation of the hacienda system in the 17th century: even forced labour had to be remunerated, and 'serfdom' of the Eastern European form, based on costless labour services, was seldom approximated in Latin America. This is not to deny that the Crown ultimately served as a machine for protecting aristocratic wealth, and channelling the surplus labour and product of the Indian population to the colonial nobility. Nevertheless, contradictions did emerge from the point of view of individual members of that nobility, whose revenues were seldom sufficient to satisfy the needs of status and 'political accumulation'. They were reflected in the rising burdens of church mortgages and the rapid turnover of property ownership which characterized many regions.

The Crown's perpetual fiscal difficulties, and the shortfall in the marketed surplus of grain for both cities and mines which resulted from the decline of the Indian population, made the expansion of the hacienda in 17th century Mexico as inevitable as the Crown's efforts to delay it by measures to regulate grain prices and check speculation were futile (Hassig 1985, p. 245). But the same fiscal problems (like the structural dislocations which characterised the metro politan domestic economy, a consequence of pre-modern imperialism) played another rôle in shaping wealth accumulation in the colonial world: bureaucracy provided its own unofficial or semi-official rewards on a grand scale, and at every level, since while 'native élites' still played a rôle as intermediaries between the Indian and Spanish sectors, their wealth was also based on the fruits of office, directly, and as capital for private enterprises based on agricultural, pastoral, and commercial activities.

Certainly, the systems of exploitation which developed in the colonies were increasingly perceived as different systems from their indigenous predecessors by the Indians, particularly as the Crown became increasingly eager to receive its tribute in cash. The replacement of the principle of labour service reciprocated with 'hospitality' by tribute in the Andes was a major innovation. As the labour draft gradually disappeared in the mid-17th century in central Mexico, new mechanisms promoted

the forcible integration of the Indian communities into the Spanish commercial economy as commodity *producers* as well as labourers, in particular the *repartimiento de comercio* or *repartimiento de mercancías*.

The *repartimientos* could take two forms, the forced advance of cash against the delivery of commodities for resale within a stipulated period, or the forced sale of goods at prices above their free market values, one form tending to predominate over the other according to the region. Even in periods and places where 'official' *repartimientos* existed, local officials in alliance with mercantile interests used their juridical coercive power to feather their private nests at the expense of their Indian charges, and 'unofficial' versions of the practice often persisted in the face of official opposition. *Repartimientos* provoked more unrest and rioting than tensions in the emergent labour relations between community and hacienda in central Mexico (Brading 1978, p. 8). But in regions where the development of commercial haciendas was not significant, official *repartimientos* endured longer and probably damaged the Indian economy most severely. In the Yucatan forced deliveries by Indian producers supplied the colony's major export commodities in the 17th century. Farriss concludes that:

These transactions were so unfa vourable to the Indians—the recompense for their labour so far below current market prices and the size of the repartimiento often so excessive as to interfere with food production—that only the severest forms of physical coercion could induce the Indians to accept them (Farriss 1983, p. 8).

Despite such evident breaks with the pre-Hispanic past, it is less clear that the Spanish colonial political economy was terribly 'special' in a wider comparative framework. To what extent did the rôle of commodity production within this social formation lend it any special character in comparison with China or the Middle East? Much of the dynamic of the Hispanic-American empire was based on the kind of conflict and accommodation between landlord classes and the state typical of so many imperial and monarchical formations in universal history. The colonial state's 'protection' of the Indians has particular nuances given to the colonial ethnic stratification system, but the preservation of Indian community property seems to fit in with broader patterns. In the late colonial period, under the Bourbons, concern with the erosion of the state's tributary base (in the context of increasing foreign commercial penetration in the Indies and other symptoms of the inadequacy of the Spanish state machinery) led to an active concern with the kind of 'land reforms' characteristic of other imperial formations.

In the Peruvian case, Spalding argues that the increasing frequency of court decisions favouring communities which could demonstrate that they lacked a sufficient land-base to satisfy their basic subsistence 'needs' really only served to equalize poverty (Spalding 1984, p. 206). Her analysis of Huarochiri emphasizes the way 'traditional' Andean social relationships to land had been progressively transformed as Indian communities adapted to their forcible incorporation into Spanish commercial economy as commodity-producers through such mechanisms as the *reparimiento de*

*mercancias* as well as their formal tributary obligation to the state. Huarochiri's development related to the proximity of the Lima market, and the profits of native commerce were limited by the control exercised over that market by black, mulatto, mestizo, and Spanish intermediaries, a good reflection of the implications of colonial status hierarchy. But by the 18th century surplus village land was being rented to secure monetary income and land accumulation processes linked to wealth differentiation were well established.

The breakdown of traditional Andean patterns with respect to property was accelerated by the effects of what had originally been in part a necessary strategy of community defence against the impact of depopulation: the Crown, once again responding to the fiscal exigencies of war, in effect forced the Indians to acquire private title to land under the system of *composiciones de tierras* which had underpinned the consolidation of haciendas in the previous century on the coast, or face substantial loss of holdings. The purchase of *private* (though still *corporate*) titles to land by communities made them autonomous from more inclusive social units above the village level, and 'inserted a wedge in the nested hierarchy of rights to land that integrated large groups in Andean society despite local quarrels' (Spalding 1984, p. 183). This type of land purchase was concentrated on terrain which was subject to intercommunal disputes and land which could be commercially valorized: élite *kuraka* lineages were able to detach community lands for their personal benefit, though their position as a 'native nobility' caught between the pressures of community expectations and the need to establish bridges into European society became increasingly contradictory, as the 18th century brought increasing pressures of exploitation on the provinces in the wake of the loss of Peru's monopoly over the South American trade. *Kurakas* were responsible for their community's tribute obligations, and public office became an increasingly unattractive burden. Ethno-stratification prevented the full assimilation of those *kurakas* who retained their identity with their communities into the colonial status structure, many had their special status revoked in the wake of the reaction which followed the major Indian rebellions of the 18th century, and only the wealthiest and most powerful retained their position after independence, by merging with the national élite. Since the Bourbon land reforms in Huarochiri were directed solely towards redistributing land between Indian communities, to secure the continuing and hopefully expanded reproduction of the Indians as Crown tribute-payers, they touched only the emergent pattern of class stratification within the Indian sector, whilst inter-communal conflict was simply exacerbated by the loss of land to neighbours (Spalding 1984, p. 207).

The Bourbon authorities did, on occasion, take actions which superficially appeared to threaten the property rights of the colonial élite. The great hacienda of Guaracha, in western Michoacán, had engrossed the land of 'indigenous pueblos' continuously through the 17th century, including those of the municipal *cabecera*, renamed 'Guarachita' in recognition of its subordination to the *latifundio*. Guarachita's 61 Indian tributaries, residing in a community which also contained 13 Spaniards at the end of the 18th century, received direct encouragement to pursue a claim for land restitution against the hacienda in the provincial courts. Yet such moves were of qualified significance: the proceedings came to nothing after the estate was bought by

a powerful regional merchant who actually came to live on his estate and was well connected in official circles (Moreno 1980, pp. 92–5). The case reveals much about late colonial society: the most successful *hacendados* were also merchants, and great economic power had a definitive influence on local administration and justice. But their position was still dependent on the ‘extra-economic’ coercive power of the colonial state: the new *hacendado* and his entire family perished in the insurgency.

During the insurgency, hacienda tenants withheld their rents and took up arms. Yet a century later, the region was tranquil during the revolution. The majority of hacienda peones and sharecroppers rejected land reform and tacitly supported the Cristero rebellion. In the interim, the local population had experienced large-scale proletarianization in the face of the hacienda expansion and the development of an internal hacienda regime based on the habitual use of disciplinary violence by the armed guards of the *patron*, oriented to creating a ‘docile’ working individual, and backed up by the Porfirian state’s chain-gang and the ‘criminalization’ of social protest. Though the Porfirian hacienda looked more like a ‘fiefdom’ than its predecessors, increased landlord power in fact reflected new techniques for effecting political centralization after the radical decentralization of power which followed the end of empire, accompanied by a modernization and rationalization of the apparatuses of class domination.

Though haciendas varied greatly in scale, and there are striking regional variations in patterns of agrarian change, the ‘great estate’ was a radically new phenomenon in the Americas. The emergent pattern of land accumulation and economic stratification encountered in the Indian communities of Huarochirí was of a quite different order from that represented by the hacienda, even abstracting from the way such social differentiation pales before the fundamental divide in the colonial stratification system. As in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, unequal land-holding among 18th century Indians in this region did not correspond to the formation of a consolidated estate, but a fragmented pattern of scattered tenures over *pedazos*. To some extent the development of land-tenure systems even in the more commercialized regions of highland Peru corresponded to the constraints of vertical ecology, and Mexico offered a more suitable terrain for the implantation of European farming systems, though the market, rather than optimal ecological adaptation, underlay much of this transformation. Even in Mexico, the final stages of hacienda expansion against indigenous communities had to await the liberal ‘reform’ and abolition of colonial communal tenures. By 1910, about half the Mexican rural population still lived in ‘free villages’, but less than 50 per cent of these communities now retained control of any land (Brading 1980, p. 11). Yet the Guaracha example indicates that the hacienda had already had significant transformative impact in many regions by the end of the colonial period. As the Indian population began to surpass its pre-colonial levels again by the late 18th century, it often required more land *per capita* than in the preHispanic period as a result of hacienda expropriation of the water supplies which had sustained aboriginal intensive maize cultivation: an increasing number of Indians ceased to be self-sufficient farmers, paying tribute to the state and acting as a seasonal labour reserve for the estates, and were pulled into other relationships as tenants and sharecroppers.



The full significance of decentralized class control over resources within this social formation became clear after Independence. After the collapse of the imperial state, effective power passed to regional *caudillos*. A 'praetorian oligarchy' played a game of musical chairs in the Presidential Office in Mexico City, while regional strong-men were building up private armies and a clientalistic form of domination on the basis of landed property. This pattern proved hard to break, not least because the disorder of *caudillo* politics was underpinned by the continuation of the processes of inter-class conflict which had exploded at the time of the insurgency, and did so again in the period of political crisis following the major territorial losses to the USA of the 1840s, now unmediated by even the relatively weak apparatus of countervailing centralized power represented by an imperial state (Gledhill 1987).

But if it is important to recognize the rôle played by various spontaneous forms of 'class conflict', it is equally important to understand that the relationship between class conflict and political conflict was not a simple and direct one. In Mexico, 'liberalism', the revolt of the periphery against the colonial centre, was only a 'class' movement in the sense that certain segments of the colonial society with an identifiable class position supported the liberal cause—the merchants of Veracruz, and small landed proprietors and *rancheros* of the Bajío and the west (Sinkin 1979). The core of the liberal leadership contained those who were denied access to the political commanding heights and real wealth by the monopolies of the colonial status order—petty bureaucrats, junior officers of low birth, and professionals, generally mestizo. They were urban people who mostly had little understanding of or sympathy for the problems of the rural masses. Ironically, it was not the liberal Benito Juárez, of Zapotec descent and the hero of the national liberation struggle against the French, but the tragic figure of Maximilian Habsburg who was to be the author of the 19th century's only serious legislative attempt to improve the lot of hacienda workers.

Maximilian's fate was in part the result of his being too much of a modernizer for Mexican conditions: he took the view that effective states should tax the propertied classes. Many *hacendados* saw less to fear in the liberal programme than in the conservatives' project of recentralizing political and fiscal control, and the material benefits the dominant class received from cancellation of church mortgages and expropriation of ecclesiastical real estate proved a stronger determinant of their behaviour than religious scruples. It was the Indian community which provided the staunchest opposition to the reform, correctly surmising that the abolition of communal land tenure and the final transition to a class society based on absolute private property threatened greater impoverishment for the majority than the perpetuation of their existing status. The church's opposition was overcome under the Porfirian settlement of the last quarter of the 19th century, its wealth scarcely touched: it continued to dominate in the provision of financial and administrative services to the landed bourgeoisie, whose sons continued to enter Holy Orders, and in rejuvenating its organization to reconquer its mass base from the threat posed by secular ideologies, it managed to conserve much of its social power amongst the lower classes whilst placing itself at the service of an expanding agrarian capitalism (Gledhill 1987, Tapia 1986).

The outcome of the reform was not the creation of a 'modern' state on the Western paradigm (as proclaimed in liberal ideology). Liberal governments came to power because their opponents lacked an effective class base, and, in both Peru and Mexico, had lamentably failed to defend national integrity in military conflicts. The liberals inherited empty treasuries, and had no option but to seek foreign loans and open their economies to foreign capital. The ineffectiveness of post-Independence central state machineries therefore promoted 'peripheralization'. That Porfirio Díaz attempted to centralize by building a state on the principles of patronage and personal clientship between dictator and local élite, whilst relying on the export economy to solve the problem posed by continuing fiscal weakness and shortage of investment capital, demonstrates the structural difficulty created by the previous decentralization, already inscribed in the political economy of the imperial regime itself. The Porfiriato did push forward the process of proletarianization, and promoted a significant amount of new peasant differentiation within the 'free' villages too: but the form of large-scale agrarian capitalism it sponsored was still, for the most part, earning profits dependent on the monopoly control of land and the possibility of exercising extra-economic coercion over rural workers and sharecroppers (Gledhill 1985). When economic growth slowed down, the Porfirian state reaped the harvest of its unusually spirited, albeit compromised, attempt to restore political centralization on the basis of arbitrary, personalistic power. This crisis of what was now a more than vestigial state machine helps explain why a large-scale social revolutionary process was carried through in Mexico and not elsewhere in Latin America in this period. The revolution fused together the continuing discontents of the unsatisfied provincial urban petty bourgeoisie, various other reactions to political centralization, and agrarian revolt.

This sketch of the transformations wrought by colonialism and the relationship between post-imperial political-economic decentralization and capitalist expansion represents a top-down structural view. In order to understand the various resistances to modern processes of state formation alluded to above, we need to complement it with some views from the bottom of Hispanic-American society.

### **Views from below: an example from central Mexico**

The impact of conquest from the point of view of the conquered cannot be assessed adequately on the basis of modern ethnography, yet it seems equally unsatisfactory to base analysis simply on 16th century sources. Colonial society was still evolving, and both Spaniards and Indians were still groping for an understanding of each other and accommodating the fact of conquest into their respective cosmologies. It would be unwise to assume that what eventually crystallized was a pair of uniform models, one 'Indian', the other 'Spanish', leaving aside the need to recognize the phantasmagorical nature of some of the representations which constituted the imagery of the colonial order as a cultural construct. The 'native élite' which mediated relations between Indian and Spanish sectors, with its control of resources, linguistic fluency in the colonists' language, adoption of hispanic cultural styles, and sometimes even inter-marriage with Spaniards, clearly differed in some of its orientations from the poorer strata in its

communities. Similarly, different segments of the colonial population had differing social outlooks even at the beginning of the colonial period—Spanish bureaucrats from lower tiers of the metropolitan status hierarchy sometimes express a distaste for those who were treated as native ‘natural lords’ (on the European medieval paradigm) which reflects the emergent social tensions within their own society (Spalding 1984, p. 152).

But it would be equally misleading to assume that poor Indians lacked any *practical* grasp of the workings of Spanish colonial society above the village level, despite the obvious barriers posed by illiteracy to a grasp of legal forms—a problem which continues to afflict contemporary peasantries in societies in which the convolutions of bureaucratic language serve the ends of securing domination. The endemic nature of long-distance labour migration, seasonal work on local haciendas, and in many cases, permanent shifts of residence to new regions, prevents us from taking the ‘closed corporate community’ model too literally. It is therefore of some significance that 18th century Nahuatl documents which express the historical consciousness of Valley of Mexico Indian towns, the *títulos primordiales*, express a narrow corporate view of self, despite the fact that all segments of their population had access to wider information, and the élite clearly organized its thoughts and behaviour in a quite different way when transacting business with Spanish officials (Lockhart 1982, pp. 36–70).

The *títulos primordiales* represented a parallel Indian account, in a declaratory style adapted for recital at public meetings, of the basis of a community’s claims to its land. The documents were created in the context of official Spanish land surveys and confirmation of community land rights, but they reflected Indian criteria rather than those which would be asserted directly to the Spanish adjudicators. They include a substantial amount of pre-conquest legendary material, which serves as a symbolic framework for assimilating the communities’ defence of their territory from expansionist haciendas to their defence against Aztec dominance. The apparent carry-over of preconquest ritual elements—such as feasting, trumpets, and mock-battles—suggests that the genre itself was aboriginal (Lockhart 1982, pp. 385–6). The documents attribute the creation of the world to the Christian God, and the founding of their towns to the Spanish Crown, Christian God, and local patron saints, and God and King serve as the foundation for the title’s legitimacy: the conquest is viewed as a cosmic event, whilst individual representatives of colonial power are in effect treated as ‘aspects’ of a single unity in keeping with ‘traditional’ Mesoamerican cosmology. Dates from the European calendar, Spanish personages, offices, and procedural concepts seem to be incorporated simply because they are ‘significant’ in terms of the authorities’ criteria for granting rights of possession; as Lockhart puts it ‘It seems as if the local people were using the Spanish paraphernalia as magic, as something efficacious rather than understood (1982, p. 390). Given the practical difficulties of obtaining ‘justice’ in this region of hacienda domination, one wonders, perhaps, what purpose more attention to ‘understanding’ might have served, and one wonders too about the implied distinction between aboriginal and European mentalities here: the world inhabited by the mind of the colonizer was as enchanted as that of the colonized, whose powers were frequently the stuff of nightmares in the colonial imagination.

These documents shed some light on the substance of the antagonism felt by the colonized towards their masters. They de-emphasize the conquest as a break in history, by bringing the preconquest Mexica threat to local (citystate) autonomy into the same myth-time category as the threat posed by the Spanish. Occasional hints of a broader Indian versus Spanish ethnicity are very low-key, and expressed in terms of the general status category 'commoner' (*macehualli*): the only other broad distinction is between Nahuatl speakers (civilized) and non-Nahua 'barbarians', which reinforces the equation of Nahuas with a system of individual corporate community territorial autonomy. There are certain millenarian motifs, references in particular to the eventual resurrection of 'our ancient fathers', and the cosmological legitimacy ascribed to God and King does not extend to individual Spaniards, who are portrayed as deceitful, using the ties of *compadrazgo* and friendship to take over land from the gullible.

Lockhart suggests that the exodus of Hispanics from city to countryside in the middle and later colonial period in central Mexico had created a substantive change in indigenous attitudes, from a perception of other indigenous communities as the primary threat in the 16th century to an emphasis on the Spanish influx: the injunctions to the population not to trust Spanish *patrones* may have had a serious ring, given individual practices of land alienation in the Chalco region in the late colonial and Independence eras (Tutino 1975). On the other hand, we have already noted ways in which colonial policy exacerbated intercommunal land disputes even in conditions of depopulation without significant hacienda expansion: given rebuilding Indian populations (earlier in Mexico than Peru), coupled with hacienda expansion and an influx of Spaniards into the Indian towns themselves, the situation in 18th century central Mexico would seem far worse. What Indian depopulation coupled with hacienda expansion did was create a cumulative process of permanent resource transfer from the Indian sector (in contrast to systems of tribute and forced labour), so that an expanding population could only be accommodated into colonial society through rental of hacienda land by Indian town-dwellers or direct incorporation into the estate. Chalco, whose rich lands attracted powerful latifundists, became an area where land pressures were particularly acute, and would therefore serve as an archetype of Gibson's late colonial trend towards a pattern of each community confronting the hacienda as a separate entity (Gibson 1964, pp. 408–9).

On the basis of the *títulos primordiales*, it seems possible to argue that the preHispanic 'city-state' unit had, in a sense, 'survived' the change in the larger system of supra-local hegemony and forms of domination represented by the conquest: after all, the colonial Indian upper stratum's dual orientation and differential enclavement in a power structure beyond the community also has its echoes in the situation of members of dynastic groups in the pre-Hispanic imperial state (Gledhill 1988). It must be emphasized that such community élites were scarcely heir to the same kind of social position as their pre-Hispanic predecessors, and what we have described does not necessarily undermine the argument that the corporate structure of Indian communities was a defensive reaction to the colonial situation rather than a direct 'survival' of preconquest organization (Wasserstrom 1983a). Yet the continuity of such a parallel documentary tradition concerned with claims to legitimacy in the domains of power

and property into the late colonial period gives an indication of what underlay the adoption of elements of Christian cosmology and Spanish civil forms. It is not, as Spanish clerics were wont to claim, a matter of 'paganism' surviving unscathed behind a cynical indeed diabolical, outward observance of the true Faith. By the late colonial period Indians accepted the 'truth' of Christianity wholeheartedly, and saw themselves as good Catholics: it was simply that it was *their* truth, founded in a set of syncretic beliefs and practices—certainly very different from European beliefs and practices—which corresponded to their own search for meaning, identity, and deliverance from the injustices of colonial society (Wasserstrom 1983a, Taussig 1980).

### **Resistance to capitalism and to centralization**

Independence did not end the racist quality of stratification systems in the Americas, nor did it lead to the immediate destruction of the colonial status order. It did, however, lead to a rapid merging of what remained of the 'Indian élites' with the non-Indian colonial upper strata, and subsequently, with the triumph of liberalism, appeared to have removed the remaining barriers against a transition to a 'modern' agrarian class structure, even if the professed liberal ideal of consolidating a 'yeomanry' made little real headway. The citizen Indian was free to expropriate or be expropriated. Since the expansion of the hacienda was not universal, and the emergence of wealth differentiation and commodity relationships within Indian communities was not totally innovatory, the shift involved would not have been perceived from below in the same way in all regions. Some communities disintegrated from internal pressures rather than external encroachment, whilst others stopped short of total class polarization, despite wealth differentiation and even violent *caciquismo* on the part of village 'bosses', accompanied by an increasing dependence on wage labour for family reproduction. Since village *caciques* seem to have been the main targets of peasant agitation in central Mexico before the revolution, the trend to wards intra- (and inter-) village polarization in regions which offered opportunities for the continuing development of smaller-scale commercial agriculture should not be underestimated.

On the other hand, the Mexican revolution could scarcely have occurred at all had it not been for the continuing tenacity of the 'free village' in the face of the accelerated hacienda expansion and depredations of mestizo communities and *caciques* provoked by the Porfiriato. Though the expansion of the sugar haciendas in Morelos combined with specific local political and military factors to produce the *Zapatista* phenomenon, sustained and broadly based agrarian movements centred on the alienation of village lands characterized other regions, such as Tlaxcala, Puebla, Sonora (the Yaquis), and La Laguna, whilst smaller-scale and more particularistic agrarian conflicts occurred to the west in Tarascan Michoacán, and down the length of the Sierra Madre Oriental from southern Tamaulipas to Veracruz (Knight 1980, pp. 22–5, 1985). Not all these agrarian struggles involved Indian communities and they were complemented by another form of rural movement in areas where the hacienda was not a significant feature on the social landscape. Knight terms these nonagrarian popular risings *serrano*

movements: they represented a backlash against the encroachment of central political control which was the other side of the Porfirian coin: the *jefe político*, taxman, police, and recruiting sergeant (Knight 1980, p. 28).

Lower-class resistance to political centralization is a crucial factor in the modern social history of Mexico, and, one suspects, of much wider interest. In regions which were not noted for broad-based agrarian movements, such as the western states, the popular movement known as the *Cristiada* took an apparently 'counter-revolutionary' turn from the standpoint of the professed social ideology of the post-revolutionary modernizers, yet at another level appeared to have much in common with *Zapatismo*. Meyer has argued that the *Cristiada* represented a struggle for autonomy against 'Leviathan', the 'new, authoritarian capitalist state' created by the revolutionary *caudillos* from the North (Meyer 1976). 'Objectively', the post-revolutionary state remained weak, though in the wake of the Porfirian experience, it arguably did more than enough to manifest the authoritarian nature of its project. But more significant, perhaps, was the way the secularizing reorganization of civil society from above was made more difficult by the way religion had consolidated its place in the social life of the underclasses in a world of political arbitrariness, almost unimaginable violence, and dispossession (Gledhill 1987).

If we take the view from below, it is certainly clear that even those elements in the juridically independent 'indigenous *pueblos*' which actively contested their despoliation by *latifundios* such as Guaracha, did not have a terribly positive view of 'the government'. The basis of the agrarian movement in such communities seems invariably to have been literate kulaks renting hacienda land, and the leaders, storekeepers, artisans, or resident professionals who had patronage relationships with urban politicians, sharing the values of those who saw the 'modernization' of the national state apparatus as the route to national social transformation. Their *kulak* supporters' material interests led them in the direction of agrarian revolt: the armed guard of the Guaracha hacienda forced them to ship out their maize surpluses to the free market of Jalisco under cover of darkness as 'contraband'. But the surviving members of this group whom I interviewed all stressed their double oppression ('humiliation') by hacienda and 'government' alike, a 'government' whose immediate impact on village life was forced requisition, conscription, and rape. It was a matter of the better of two evils, and for both poorer and more oppressed hacienda workers and better off segments of the small proprietor/commercial sector, the balance clearly tipped the other way after a decade of revolutionary violence.

In this kind of regional context, the 'free community' was probably a weaker force of resistance to the hacienda by the end of the colonial period. The conquest dislocated aboriginal political units which had crossed the divide between plain and sierra: the Indian communities on the borders of the western Ciénega de Chapala were marginal outposts of a statelet whose centre lay in the Meseta Tarasca (Gerhard 1972, pp. 386–7), and *latifundio* expansion isolated the detached groups of Indian tributaries. But the wider context of the haciendapeasant relations also influenced the emergent pattern: ranchers and pastoralists in the non-Indian hill-country formed a resistant force to the imposition of any centralized order. In the modern context, a complex ethnopolitical model operates in the countryside, complemented by a set of contrasts between the

urban élites of the two local towns, one owing its position to politics and administration, the other—a Cristero centre—to commerce. The hills are associated with wildness, violence, and political freedom, the plains with docility, pacification, and susceptibility to repression, a contrast which contains an element of real truth. The hills have the dual association with Spanish smallholders and pastoralists, on the one hand, and Indian communities, on the other, both of which are seen as successful foci of resistance to control in rather different ways. The *ex-peones* and sharecroppers of the hacienda endlessly debate their own ethnic identity, at one moment emphasizing their status as '*indigenes*' (in contrast to the Spanish *patrones* of the hacienda), at another distinguishing themselves from Indians in a way which asserts superiority (poorly socialized members of the community are referred to as '*muy indio*'), and at yet another explaining their more recent misfortunes at the hands of the modern state in terms of the mixture of their blood. Even the inhabitants of the '*indigenous pueblos*', whose current land rights are legitimized by their primordial claims, participate in this situational definition of identity: the inhabitants of the village of Totolan, for example, assert their 'plains' characteristics against their neighbours in the *rancho* of Los Remedios, but a gunshot away across the main road. In this apparently confused situation, one can see the full complex of elements which constituted the Spanish-Indian society of Mexico, a society whose dynamics cannot be fully grasped simply by looking at the colonial centre.

One of the peculiar historical features of the Mexican case is that the incorporation of the 'popular sectors' into the state occurred much earlier than in other regions, and on the basis of significant social reforms in the countryside, thereby ensuring that the politically controlled 'masses' were more effectively excluded from actions threatening the base of the regime in subsequent periods. Mexico thus succeeded in avoiding the military regimes which dealt with the social tensions arising from the transition from agroexport economies towards greater industrialization elsewhere in Latin America. Yet one is left wondering how far the modern Leviathan—so far from the ideal type of 'legal-rational domination'—remains a patchwork of compromises reflecting the legacy of a social and political history which has yet to be expunged by modern technologies of power and monopoly capitalism.

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*The centralization of education in Mexico:  
subordination and autonomy*<sup>1</sup>

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Translated from Spanish by Victoria Forbes Adam\*

The concept of centralization has been significant in analyses of state participation in processes of change which have characterized developing countries in the contemporary period. The state has played a central rôle within economic transformations which have involved changes in the social division of labour, the formation of national markets and their incorporation into the international market, the development of industrial centres which are concentrated in a few urban power centres; in the regulation of political conflicts which have accompanied these changes and in the formation of national identities (Batley 1983, Bernstein 1977, Stavenhagen 1977).

However, such analyses have been based on general theories of the state and have only partially accounted for the diverse range of historical circumstances within which national states are developing. On the one hand these analyses have tended to reify the actions of state institutions (Skocpol 1979, pp. 30–2); and on the other hand they have, to some extent, overlooked the complex and multiple effects produced by the interaction of state agencies with various social groups and classes. This interaction is highly significant in so far as it conditions both the implementation of, and the results achieved by, state projects. Thus, these analyses appear to define socio-economic development in these countries as a direct result of the actions of such centres of power as the state (Long 1984, p. 168).

An analysis which aims to account for the diversity of historical circumstances and the social complexity of the context in which state policies are applied must necessarily investigate the capacity of groups and social classes to manipulate and to redefine their natural and social environment; and the fact that they do this in accordance with their interests, objectives, and cultural frameworks. From this perspective, it can be seen that the state intervenes and acts upon a structure that is already given. This latter point is particularly important in the analysis of processes of centralization where, as noted above, the majority have overemphasized processes of integration (Pearse 1975), homogenization (Roberts 1980), and, above all, that of subordination, which has been seen as an inevitable corollary of socio-economic development and state intervention. This emphasis on subordination has resulted in a failure to explain adequately the

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nature of contradictions and oppositions which are generated by state intervention, and which remain either latent, or are explicitly expressed.

Oppositional responses to the actions of dominant centres of power have been seen as constituting blocks to the actions of centralizing forces, or as fruitless expressions of resistance to them. From this perspective social change appears as the unilinear outcome of central state intervention which determines and shapes the resulting social configuration. It is worth considering, however, the possibility that a tendency towards autonomy and resistance may be the result of the centralizing process itself, where this is defined as a contradictory historical process whose social dynamic is determined by the differential distribution of power and the antagonisms which this implies. This conceptualization would avoid a negative definition of subordinated groups and allow an analysis of the forms of organization, appropriation of the natural and social environment, and cultural practices of these groups, seeing these as positive responses to a social order which is increasingly defined by groups and institutions engaged in the concentration of power. The behaviour of subordinated groups cannot be exclusively understood in terms of the integrative action of, or domination by the centre; analyses which reduce the actions of these groups to defensive responses, give priority to the rôle of the centre of power, and *a priori* assign it an influence which is by no means assured. Such analyses further lead to explanations of both the behaviour of, and the socio-cultural practices of, subordinated groups as functions of the dominant centre.

As was noted above, the centralization of power is a historical process whose outcome is two-dimensional. On the one hand it results in progressive subordination to a central locus of power; on the other hand it involves a loss of autonomy by centres of power whose range of action and influence were previously less extensive. These two elements are distinct, but they are cause and result of a single process, that of the concentration of power. A recognition of this distinction between subordination and autonomy is important in so far as it enables us to grasp the nature of the opposition which is established between them during the course of a given process of historical change. It should be noted, however, that the centralization of power is uneven in nature; the process of national homogenization is never complete and its limits are to an extent defined by the regional and local centres of power about which this article is concerned. These latter maintain control over those areas which centralized power has not been able to incorporate, or has had no interest in so doing. The failure to establish hegemony may be attributed either to administrative or operational weaknesses of the centralized power itself, or to the opposition generated by smaller centres of power. Such failures may, however, appear insignificant given the force of an overall general trend towards subordination to the centre, but these oppositional forces, which may in certain periods be isolated or disorganized, may under different historical circumstances become active and important elements of confrontation with, and struggle against, centralized power. This 'resistance' to the encroachments of centralized power may in turn give rise to different social configurations and a transformation of social relations. An example of the importance of such resistance in the sphere of culture—which is of particular interest to this article—can be drawn from the history of the struggle for independence by the colonized states (Fanon 1963).

Autonomous elements which escape and oppose centralized power and which are manifest in economic activity, in political organization, and in cultural life are positive expressions of meaning and identity for the social groups which are the agents of such elements. It is in this respect that a negative definition of the concept of resistance becomes problematic.

The development of the notion of national culture was fundamental to the formation and consolidation of the modern state in Mexico; its function was both to promote and to unify the diverse range of forces harnessed to the politico-economic project of national integration. In the contemporary period attempts to forge a national culture which is both meaningful and extensive are stymied in the face of the very great cultural diversity which exists throughout the national territory. A variety of alternative sources of cultural production are available, and although these are influenced by official national culture as much as by the patrons of regional cultural knowledge, they are creative and retain control over cultural production itself.

This chapter focuses on cultural plurality in its capacity to respond in a variety of ways to the social conditions within which social groups develop. In this context cultural plurality survives because it is significant for those who invest in it, and because of its positive or pragmatic character in their confrontation with the particular material and social conditions which they face in their lives.

The problem of the implementation of a national culture in the context of cultural plurality will be addressed in this chapter through the study of education.

Education is here defined as a social relation and more concretely as a relation of power between educator and student. This conceptualization is derived from Adams' study of social power (Adams 1973). Within educational practice the task of the educator is to lead the student towards the learning and internalization of determinate patterns of knowledge and conduct. This relation of power may be founded in a recognition by the student of knowledge and skills the educator has, and which the student would like to acquire; or it may be established through the exercise of coercion—social, psychological, or physical—by the educator.

Educational practice involves a multitude of factors apart from those which simply transmit skills and knowledge; social and moral values and patterns of behaviour are also communicated. In order to clarify these issues here, I have adopted a characterization which distinguishes between formal and informal educational structures. The former is defined as the institutionalized educational system, graded chronologically and hierarchically structured, which begins in primary school and ends at university. The latter involves a variety of educational activities which may be either systematically organized, or realized independently of any formal structure and whose distinctive feature is precisely its independence from institutionalized education. This broad definition of informal education may give rise to imprecision since it includes in a single category a variety of educative practices, but for the purposes of this study it has proved useful.

### **The unit of analysis**

The implementation of a national system of education in the face of educational plurality in the country as a whole will be studied at the local level although this will be considered as part of a regional totality which is situated within a particular national context. The study of a specific locality may be especially useful here, in that it provides an opportunity to consider interaction between state agencies and the different social actors involved with them. It should also be possible to identify the achievements of state policies and, above all, the variety of responses which have emerged from a situation of increased state intervention.

It should be noted that the intention of this chapter is to capture the specificities of this analytical unit, the sociocultural elements which comprise it, and the processes of change it undergoes, without seeing these as a kind of microcosmic representation of broader social processes. Steward (1955, pp. 55–70), who put forward a methodological basis for analyses which link the national, regional, local, and domestic levels, has pointed out that in every society there exist levels of social organization which retain specificity while simultaneously being functionally dependent on a larger social totality. Thus he proposes an identification of the frameworks of behaviour and institutions at these socialorganizational levels, as a necessary prelude to the analysis of their relations with other levels of social organization.

The material discussed here is drawn from an investigation of education and social change which was carried out in a region of western Mexico (González Chávez 1985). The research involved the collection of a wide range of field data obtained during an 18-month period of residence in the region; the project included a survey of a representative sample of the families living in the municipality, and bibliographical research in the archives of both the municipality and the state of Jalisco. At the empirical level therefore, the 'local' unit of analysis is the municipality.

### **The municipality and the centralization of education**

One of the consequences of the centralization of education has been a concentration of decision-making concerning the content of instructional material within the bureaucratic organization of the federal government. This has resulted in a loss of participation, at the state and municipal levels, of private educational establishments and the various educational agencies which had previously been actively involved in educational practice. This loss of participation has occurred within the framework of a socio-economic transformation of national society.

A study of educational centralization from the point of view of the municipality reveals the existence of two governmental projects: one implemented by the state government, the other by the federal government. The first was realized in such a way as to allow active participation by social groups at both regional and local levels within the social processes of their respective domains, as well as in the development of socio-economic relationships with other regions of the country and with the state itself (De la Peña 1979, González & Escobar 1979, González 1982). Education was both promoted and controlled—as we shall see below—at the local level. The second

project was carried out within the context of efforts to achieve greater economic, social, and cultural integration with the national state. This process modified the economic and social structure of the region, and the advent of greater intervention by the national state and by externally controlled private capital undermined the actions and decisions of local and regional groups (González 1982). Education passed into the hands of the federal government, which oriented it in such a way as to respond to national priorities and the search for national identity.

Nevertheless, both educational projects had elements in common. In both cases the respective governments—state and federal—defined education as falling within the domain of public interest and as such were able to justify certain interventions into realms of social life which had previously been defined as private or familial. Both governments established a single programme of state or federal control whose aims and objectives were congruent with the economic policy and political thought of the government of the day. Furthermore, a government department or *secretaría* was formed which was responsible for the implementation of educational programmes. Lastly, a system of free and compulsory education was instituted, which was intended to create equality of opportunity at the most basic level. These factors were constant in the policy of the state governments of Jalisco from the second half of the last century (Alatorre 1910, p. 57).

Operationally, the difference between state and federal policies lay in the kind of participation they afforded to the municipalities and to members of the locality who had an interest in education. The extent to which demands for local knowledge and skills accorded with demands to which formal education claimed to respond was also important in this respect.

### *The state project*

The state project was distinct from its federal counterpart in that its authority was delegated to local government and interested local individuals. Both these participated in the so-called *Juntas Locales de Instrucción* (local education committees). These committees were principally responsible for the promotion of official education, for the funding of it from the municipal budget and for its successful functioning (Alatorre 1910, González Chávez 1985). During this time, the majority of the schools provided primary instruction lasting from two to four years and they were established in municipal capitals and larger towns (González 1985). In the main, the schools aimed to complement familial and other forms of educational activities available in the locality. The schools provided basic literacy skills, grammar, and geometry, the last being of particular interest to the sons of merchants or artisans, for office employees, commercial clerks, and others involved in the management of different kinds of measures. The basic education was combined with subjects such as history, citizenship, drawing, and some practical instruction, as was the case with sewing classes for girls (Alatorre 1910, pp. 35–9, 49).

The authority delegated to the local education committees by the state government was in part a result of the instability and weakness of the governments themselves. In

the case of the state of Jalisco, for example, there were 66 changes of government during the first 53 years of state independence (Muriás 1982). The decisive rôle of the committees can also be attributed to the dominant position therein of regional and local groups who controlled economic resources and who, to a great extent, maintained social order. These dominant groups hoped that the control they exerted over instruction would eventually be beneficial to them—the more so when they participated directly in the committees.

After political stability in Jalisco and in the country as a whole had been consolidated by the definitive liberal triumph of 1885, the rôle of the state department responsible for education became progressively more active and decisive (Alatorre 1910, pp. 70–2). Social peace, which reigned until 1910, meant that the economic resources of the state increased and greater investment in education was possible. The Department of Education was also reorganized and its efficiency increased. Nevertheless, the schools continued to be financed by the municipalities until the beginning of the 20th century when fiscal reforms implemented by the state, and later the federal government, undermined the economic position of the Department and forced it to become dependent on state or federal institutions for the realization of virtually all public works.

During the last quarter of the 19th century the church widely supported the foundation of schools in every parish, the organization and jurisdiction of which was, to a great extent, coterminous with that of the municipal capitals (Davila 1967, p. 140). Such an initiative can be seen as the church's response to the increasingly active interventions of the liberal government—which had by then established the principle of official secular education—in an area which was of particular interest to the church, namely that of the education of infants. The church schools, which largely provided basic instruction, were initially the responsibility of the parish and later came under the jurisdiction of a specially created department of the archdiocese of Guadalajara (Muriás 1982, p. 66). The schools were financed by the local church, by private donation, and by parents of the students who attended them *ibid.* By 1889 students attending private elementary schools were almost as numerous as those attending state schools and by 1910 there were more private than state schools (Muriás 1982, p. 187). Thus, although the church had lost its economic strength as a result of *desamortización* laws promulgated in the middle of the 19th century, it had become an institution which acted in competition with the state government and independently of it.

### *The federal state project*

The federal project of education began with the establishment of the *Secretaría de Instrucción Pública Federal* (the Federal Department of Public Education) in 1921. The Department formulated a programme of national education, and in order to implement this within the different states of the republic it created a Department of Education in every state. In this way, two independent administrative organs were responsible for public education in each state, each with its own programme and a separate budget. The function they did share, however, was to authorize certificates of education issued to those who successfully passed through the various levels defined by state programmes. This official recognition was denied

to private schools which were obliged to 'incorporate' into one or other of the official systems. The aim of such a policy was the suppression of religious instruction; it entailed wholesale acceptance of the official programme, and inspections by the authorities who were charged with its execution. Incorporation, however, was restricted during this period owing to the fact that a very small number of people opted for a career in education, and that certificates of education were not important as far as the local or regional labour market was concerned. At this level a demonstration of practical knowledge or skill was the necessary prerequisite for employment.

The system of federal education was established independently of the local education committees and, as was noted above, the schools were maintained by the federal state. In the municipality under discussion here, for example, an elementary school with two levels was established in 1936. The initiative for the school came from the Department of Agriculture—responsible for the execution of agrarian reform—and it was welcomed by the *ejidatarios* (beneficiaries of the reform) who had recently received collectively owned land. They found a plot of land and supplied free labour for the construction of the school. This initial co-operation between *ejido* and school was thereafter dependent on the relationship which might be established between the acting *ejidal* delegate and the teacher whose turn it was to rent the *ejidal* plot. This plot was assigned to the school so that the students could learn about agricultural practices, but the plan was never successful because the teachers were not trained for such activities, nor was the programme of instruction itself intended to impart real knowledge about agriculture, or to join together local educational resources and technically competent teachers in the realization of this task. The school began to isolate itself from the community and contact with parents became less frequent, occurring only at sporadic meetings when it was necessary to communicate general information. Moreover, at these meetings parents were asked to contribute financially to the upkeep of the school and to provide various items required by it.

At the level of the state, the relationship between the Department of Education and the local committees was modified. During the second and third decades of this century the Department forged more direct relationships with head-teachers and distanced itself from the municipality and the local committees (*Archivo estatal de educación 1910–1940*). The relationship between state department and head-teachers was hierarchical and increasingly authoritarian, and the heads of schools were required to acquiesce totally to state directives. Thus the functions of the local committees were progressively undermined. These had formerly included the supervision of teachers, and evaluation at the end of each scholastic year of the work of students and teachers by means of oral examinations and exhibitions of practical work. Parents attended these events and were able to contribute to discussions of the students' progress in school. Eventually inspectors appointed by the Department of Education carried out these supervisory tasks and examinations ceased to be oral.

Co-operation between the state and federal Departments of Education was attempted in the state of Jalisco but failed to be established in any enduring way (Michel 1960, pp. 114–18). This was probably largely to do with the fact that the federal government was determined to impose a single educational policy on the nation as a whole. Thus

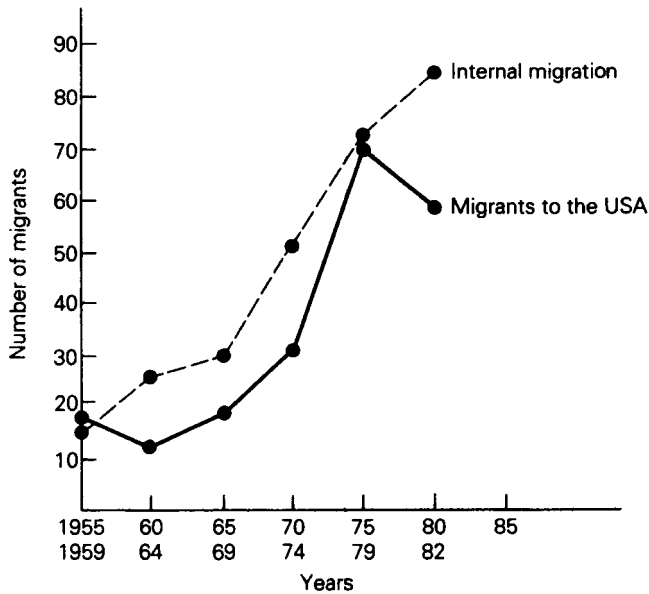


it was not until the second half of the 1950s, when free textbooks were provided to elementary schools, that the two educational programmes were unified, and the state department accepted policy defined by its counterpart at central government level for the education of the majority of the school-going population. This in turn meant that the state government was no longer able to create educational programmes. Subjects such as, for example, history and geography of the state, which encouraged a knowledge of, and identification with the state, were not given priority; persons of note who were natives of Jalisco only figured in social studies textbooks when they were deemed worthy of inclusion in the nationalist historiography.

The federal educational project was carried out at a time when economic activity and social organization at the local level were being more closely incorporated into that of the nation and when local groups were losing autonomy. Improved communications led to increased integration into the national market which was itself undergoing significant changes. Agricultural production was 'industrializing', with intensified exploitation of natural resources, increased cultivation of commercial crops, increased use of agricultural machinery, and the decline of subsistence cultivation. The transformation of agricultural production fundamentally changed the structure of the regional labour market and rural employment also declined sharply (González Chávez 1982, p. 313). Unemployment and underemployment caused by the new agricultural technology forced small producers and day-labourers to seek alternative employment outside the locality and this intensified the flow of permanent out-migrants to urban-industrial centres of growth such as Guadalajara. Temporary migration to the United States was also intensified (see Fig. 18.1). As a consequence of these changes local producers became increasingly more dependent on policies which were established by central government agencies, and by private enterprise based on national and international capital which had begun to encroach upon the locality and the region (González Chávez 1982, pp. 312–18).

At the level of the municipality, political groups whose budget was limited were obliged to become intermediaries acting on behalf of the state and federal governments if they were not to lose power altogether. Municipal elections were at this time characterized by absenteeism and by struggles between different local factions which battled for nomination by the official party (De Alba 1978, pp. 140–82). Agricultural organizations which have previously been the institutionalized forum for local participation, and which had made agrarian reform possible in the locality, became the means by which political support for the official party was controlled and mobilized, through the cooption of corrupt agrarian leaders (González Chávez 1982, p. 203).

It was within this context of attenuation of control over economic activity by local social groups, that the centralization of education was carried out. The national state gained control over the economic, political, and cultural framework of the educational structure, as well as over educational methods. This was achieved through the bureaucratic apparatus of the Department of Education and its local agents, the teachers. The influence that parents and local groups had previously been able to exercise over the way that schools were run was rendered virtually non-existent.



**Figure 18.1** Migrants from the municipality of Amacueca, Jalisco, to the interior of Mexico and to the USA (1955–82). (Source: Survey Data.)

Private education, largely controlled by the church, had managed to retain a degree of independence from the state and federal governments until the 1940s. Private schools had fulfilled a demand for instruction which the official system was unable to provide; they had focused principally on elementary and primary levels and the provision of some vocational training, such as shorthand, secretarial, bookkeeping, and teaching. After the 1940s it was more difficult to remain independent because the number of students who wished to continue their studies and enter state secondary school increased, but they were unable to do so since no official recognition was accorded to certificates from private schools. These students were obliged to sit examinations in order to 'validate' their knowledge, or even to retake the same courses in state schools. Furthermore, students from private schools had difficulties in finding employment in government agencies and, later, in large enterprises, where certificates of state education were demanded with increasing frequency. In Guadalajara, the most important industrial centre in the western region, it has been noted that, generally speaking, state education has acquired increased importance as a factor aiding access to employment (Escobar 1985). Private schools consequently experienced a decline and capitulated to pressures exerted by parents to 'incorporate' into the official system. With the adoption of the official programme they renounced—at least formally—the right to give religious instruction, and they conceded to inspection by state education authorities.

The 'incorporation' of private education into the national system was the culmination of a process by which the state achieved a *monopoly* of formal education at the national level.

The relative autonomy which private education had managed to hold on to throughout the 19th century, and for part of the 20th century, was considerably undermined by the imposition of a single national educational policy at the elementary level. A consequence of this—as will be seen below—was a system that could not absorb or recreate the educative richness and sociocultural plurality existent in the nation; it also resulted in an official practice that was authoritarian in nature.

It should be noted that the national state monopoly of education not only denied recognition and validity to private education, but also undermined informal educational structures, and the knowledge, skills, and values that were transmitted by them. Formal education and, in particular, certificates of education were increasingly adopted as the criteria of employability, learning, and culture, and as such tended to discredit and devalue informal education.

### **The scope and implications of the centralization of education**

Although the national state had achieved a centralization and monopolization of schooling, it was confronted by various problems which limited its action and rendered it inefficient.

The first of these was the demand for a system of education which would service a widely dispersed population characterized by low levels of scholarship, and high levels of demographic growth. The second problem was the existence of marked social inequalities which restricted and devalued efforts to constitute a system which would provide the school-going population with genuine possibilities for social mobility. The third problem lay with the social and cultural heterogeneity of the nation. This was rendered more acute by the inflexibility of a single national plan for education which also denied recognition to informal education.

#### *The demand for education*

It will be necessary first of all to determine the limitations which faced the formal educational structure in its attempt to fulfil the demand for education. At the national level it seems that efforts by the federal state to broaden the system during the last three decades have been insufficient and incapable of responding to demand. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of students grew from 3.2 million to 11.5 million (SEP: Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1984); in spite of this growth, the figures for national school attendance show that today the average student does not reach the fifth year of primary school and that 7.8% of the adult population is illiterate.

In 1980, 47% of those requiring elementary schooling were able to attend; at basic primary level there was nearly total attendance, although half of these (48%) left before completing the course; at the next level the proportion of the total was 45%, although at the lower end of the scale 14%, and at the higher end 40% of the students failed to

**Table 18.1** Percentages completing schooling

Level of schooling	Percentage
<b>no education:</b>	<b>13.8</b>
<b>one or two levels</b>	<b>26.1</b>
<b>four or five levels</b>	<b>15.8</b>
<b>six levels</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>some education: secondary</b>	<b>10.6</b>
<b>not specified</b>	<b>13.7</b>

complete. At secondary level 13.4% of the total population requiring schooling attended and approximately 40% did not complete (SEP: Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1984, Latapí 1983).

A consideration of the efficiency of the school system can be clarified by reference to those who begin at primary level and continue through the system to university level. Taking the generation 1966–1982 as an example it can be seen from the official statistics that from every 100 students who began at the bottom, only 32 completed any course beyond primary level; 19 completed the course to lower secondary, and 8 completed to upper secondary level; only 5 managed to get to university level (Latapí 1983).

In terms of the municipality studied here, whose population was dedicated almost entirely to agricultural activities, the situation was even less satisfactory than at the national level. According to the 1980 Population Census (Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto 1984), levels of schooling for the population of 12 years of age or more were as shown in [Table 18.1](#).

Thus both at the national level and at the local level it can be seen that in quantitative terms alone the educational system has not been successful in its attempt to implement its policy so as to include the whole population, and to provide an educational service which offers instruction beyond the primary level.

### *Social inequalities*

Looked at in qualitative terms the situation is no better. The development of the national system of education has not succeeded in overcoming the problem of social inequality; if anything, these inequalities have intensified. This question has been widely discussed in the literature, and it will suffice to present a few comments here which are of particular relevance to this chapter.

In the face of its inability to implement successfully an educational programme which would extend to include the total population, the state has applied its policies selectively, privileging certain regions and social sectors.

At the regional level, Appendini & Murayama (1972) have examined these tendencies which have characterized national economic and social development from 1900 to 1960. They selected a group of ten economic variables, and eight social variables; one of these latter was education, and the following indicators were

considered: school-going population registered at primary schools, literacy/illiteracy, and the student: teacher ratio. Among the conclusions drawn by the authors from this period were the following: increased economic growth and the social benefits resulting from it were concentrated within a few states, and this ultimately gave rise to a situation which was not dissimilar to that which existed at the beginning of the century (the states included the Federal District and some of the northern states, in particular Neuva León). Moreover, the inequalities between states were greater in 1960 than they had been in 1900. The authors propose that this uneven transformation 'is to a large extent the result of government economic policy which has focussed its greatest efforts on more developed zones whose contribution to total national production is greater in the short term' (Appendini & Murayama 1972, pp. 139–40). They further note that educational services were concentrated in states which were showing more dynamic economic growth and larger urban populations. In the sphere of education, they note a more marked interstate differentiation in 1960 than in 1900, than in the rest of the variables chosen for the study (Appendini & Murayama 1972, pp. 136–8). More recent studies confirm these findings. In 1979, for example, 88.4% of the population requiring basic education received this in urban areas, compared with 65.7% in rural areas; 60% and 13% of students completed courses in urban and rural areas respectively (Latapí 1983; see also Ibarrola 1981).

In the municipality under consideration here, the same differential was noted, with a concentration of educational services in the larger towns. Population distribution was as follows: in the municipal capital there were 2393 inhabitants; in Tepec there were 1296; the rest of the population totalled 1003 and was dispersed among 27 villages with less than 500 inhabitants. The two largest population centres had preschool, primary, and secondary school facilities. The school buildings were adequate and equipped with rudimentary furniture for both students and teachers. In the villages, on the other hand, the buildings were often inadequate, there were no preschool facilities, and primary classes were in the hands of a single teacher dealing with classes of 20–45 students at different levels. In interviews conducted with some of these teachers they acknowledged that the quality of education in these 'unitary' schools was not as high as in the municipal capital. This was considered, among other things, to be due to the fact that they had to work with students at various levels, and because both parents and students were less enthused about the schools themselves, which they felt were relatively isolated from the rest of the community. Moreover, it was observed that the majority of the teachers in these rural 'unitary' schools were young, were still studying themselves in teacher-training colleges, or had only recently qualified and therefore did not have much teaching experience.

Intra-municipal differentiation was also revealed by the figures for levels of schooling achieved according to place of residence. In the municipal capital and the second largest town, the averages for school attendance were 5.5 and 4.8 years respectively; in the villages, average attendance was for 4.2 years and levels of illiteracy were notably higher in the latter case (see [Table 18.2](#)).

Furthermore, a comparison of the levels of education achieved in the municipal capital and the rest of the municipality showed that in the capital illiteracy had not disappeared (9% of the population), but that schools in the capital did not face the

**Table 18.2** Educational Grade attained by the population aged over 12 years in the municipality of Amacueca, Jalisco.

Grade attained	Municipality (%)	Amacueca Town (%)	Tepec (%)	Hamlets (%)
none	10.42	8.77	7.14	18.91
<i>Primaria</i>	66.8	61.41	73.97	70.13
1–3 years	25.12	24.57	29.08	21.95
4–5 years	17.65	15.35	18.36	23.18
6 years	23.41	21.49	26.53	25.00
<i>Secundaria</i>	14.58	18.42	13.26	5.48
7–8 years	7.96	9.65	8.16	3.05
9 years	6.62	8.77	5.10	2.43
<i>Preparatoria or Normal</i>	7.23	8.99	4.60	5.48
10–11 years	3.43	4.82	1.03	2.43
12–13 years	3.80	4.17	3.57	3.05
university	1.59	2.41	1.03	0
13–15 years	1.22	1.75	1.03	0
16+ years	0.37	0.66	0	0
Average number of years in education		5.5	4.8	4.2
<i>total (N)</i>	816	456	196	164

Source: Survey Data.

problem of excess demand for educational services. In these schools, it was also found that the proportion of the population who received primary and secondary education was higher than in the rest of the municipality (see Table 18.2). This fact indicates that the most important population centre (from both political and economic points of view), with a higher proportion of investment in education, better educational facilities, and more competent personnel, was also the site of *more acute* educational differentiation.

Research which has focused on the socio-economic background of students has shown that, in general, intermediate and upper strata have greater access to, and spend longer periods in the educational system (see de Ibarrola 1981, Latapí 1983, Muñoz Izquierdo & Rodríguez 1980, pp. 23–42). Differentiation according to socio-economic background is also significant in relation to the successful development of school-leavers within the labour market. This has been demonstrated in the work of Muñoz Izquierdo and colleagues, who noted the decisive influence of social background both in terms of the type of employment obtained, and in terms of the levels of income earned by schoolleavers of a given generation (Muñoz Izquierdo & Rodríguez 1976; Muñoz Izquierdo *et al.* 1978).

At the level of the municipality there was also evidence of differentiation of access, and length of time spent in education according to socio-economic background. In a study of 16 genealogical histories which included representatives from the different

socio-economic groups, it was found that access to education at lower and upper secondary levels was generally greater in the case of those students whose parents were involved in more commercialized agriculture or in wholesale trade. In the case of the children of peasants, artisans, and day-labourers it was found that while levels of education had improved during the course of this century, the majority did not pass beyond the basic level, and had proportionally less access to the lower-secondary and secondary levels (González Chávez 1985, pp. 212–15).

To conclude, the process of educational centralization can be seen to have resulted in a system that is unable to satisfy a broad demand for educational services, and it has increased social differentiation at both the geographical and socio-economic levels. The *concentration* of educational resources in economically more dynamic regions, and the failure to compensate for spatial and socio-economic differentiation are the effects of a policy of state education which grew out of a more general project for national development.

### *Sociocultural heterogeneity*

The process of educational centralization has intensified a situation of social and cultural heterogeneity in the nation. A preliminary approach to this question has been elaborated in the work of Rama who suggests that heterogeneity has been the most significant outcome of the development of educational systems in Latin America. He states that

the dominant model for education in Latin America consolidates and reproduces structural heterogeneity insofar as it creates an extreme polarization between highly educated individuals and others who are excluded from education or who receive a minimal three years of instruction which marginalize them from the totality of the social process of the future (Rama 1974, p. 28).

This perspective allows us to question the achievements of the system of education and the attempt to generalize given frameworks of knowledge, skills, and values, both at the level of education, and in the creation of a national identity. The limits of such an analysis, however, lie with the proposition that social 'polarization' occurs because of the structure of formal education, which is defined *a priori* as the means by which access to modern society is gained. While it is clearly the case that the rôle of formal education has become increasingly important in this respect, particularly in the urban-industrial sector, its mediating rôle is in no way definitive. Research carried out in Mexico has shown that the rôle of education in the determination of employment and incomes, varies according to the type of industry in question, and the internal organization of labour in different kinds of productive units (Muñoz Izquierdo *et al.* 1978, Escobar 1985). Moreover, it has been shown that other factors such as sex and social background (Muñoz Izquierdo *et al.* 1978),

and type of school attended (Muñoz Izquierdo et al. 1978, p. 197), also mediate access to the labour market and partially determine levels of income.

A second approach to the question of heterogeneity, suggested here, defines this as a result both of formal and of informal educational practices, where these latter have not remained marginal to the processes of social change which the nation has undergone. The importance of informal education as a form of apprenticeship for social groups who have not been incorporated into the formal system, or where levels of education are low, has been noted above; but these practices have also been important for social groups whose educational levels are higher, who confront very diverse problems and situations, and for whom school education has proved unhelpful or irrelevant. Such limitations have been openly recognized by the educational authorities in the National Programme of Education, Culture, Recreation, and Sports (SEP: Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1984), which noted the low quality of institutionalized education, and its failure to provide knowledge and skills required by contemporary economic development (SEP: Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1984, pp. 20–1, see also Latapí 1983). The authorities have also pointed out that

in general, the various kinds and modalities of education have not been able to generate habits or attitudes which encourage self-learning. Learning processes oriented around the notion of education as a process which extends throughout the life of an individual, are conspicuous by their absence (SEP: Poder Ejecutivo Federal 1984, p. 21).

The heterogeneity reproduced by educational practice should be explained by reference to the economic, social, and cultural conditions within which various social groups develop. The decision to opt for either formal or informal education is a function of such conditions, and it is therefore more appropriate to speak in terms of dominant modes of formal or informal learning, than of systems of education which function as separate entities (Labelle 1980, pp. 43–4).

The *raison d'être* of sociocultural heterogeneity is the educational process itself, which begins in infancy and continues throughout the life of any individuals; in more general terms, various groups existing at different levels of the social totality exercise some control over the socialization of new generations, and over their immediate social environment. Thus, the character of educational development and subsequent experience of the labour market is profoundly influenced by the economic and sociocultural universe in which they occur.

The particular characteristics of heterogeneity within the process of contemporary national development are rooted in the unequal growth of an educational system which has privileged certain geographical regions as well as social strata located higher up on the socio-economic scale. These characteristics are also a product of the failure of the system itself to incorporate the sociocultural plurality existent in the nation through its single plan for national education. In its attempts to gain political control over education, the national state excluded independent agencies, the state, and the municipality from participation in the educational process, and created a national state



monopoly which would undermine, indeed deny the validity of, informal educational practices.

In spite of this devaluation of informal education, it has remained dynamic and creative; furthermore, its pragmatic character and its function as a source of social and cultural meaning for the social groups who invest in it have not necessarily been undermined by the advent of an institutionalized state educational system. Informal education has developed alongside this system which has itself become increasingly inflexible, isolated, and inefficient. In this respect, informal education has developed autonomously, or outside the control of the state.

At a general level, the heterogeneity which is manifest by the existence of multiple educational practices, is closely related to the extent to which formal or informal education may be instrumental in the exercise of control over the social conditions in which particular social groups may find themselves. In the case of the rural locality under consideration here, it was observed that although the municipality had suffered a loss of autonomy in the sphere of formal education, it has retained a degree of control over informal educational practices, and that the relationship between these latter and processes of social change within the locality was significant.

### **Education and local social change**

At the local level the teaching of work-skills was largely carried out within the family. Children learnt to carry out the different tasks performed by their parents before participating in the wider economic and social world. Parents were in charge of a pedagogical process which they themselves had lived through, and which involved guiding and teaching their children in a way that was appropriate, both to the difficulty of the tasks in question, and the degree of intellectual and corporal development attained by the children themselves. By the time they reached 14 or 16 years of age children were more or less trained in the practice of some occupation; this was most often that of peasant in the primary sector; that of baker, bricklayer, shoemaker, or seamstress in the secondary sector; or that of butcher, shopkeeper, and so on in the tertiary sectors (González Chávez 1985, pp. 247–68).

The acquisition of skills in a given trade or occupation did not cease at this age but was a continuous process; skills were polished and improved by practice, and better ways of doing things were sought. Thus the most systematic and creative stood out conspicuously against their fellows. In this context both locally generated competition, and any innovations which were feasible given determinate human and capital resources, were inducements to continue the learning process.

In the municipality, occupational and trade specialization satisfied the requirements for most goods and services. New occupations such as that of mechanic, driver, electrician, operator of agricultural machinery, and so on, emerged as necessary, the practitioners learning these skills outside the locality and passing them on to those within it.

Technological innovation and the introduction of new factors of production into both agricultural production and other activities generally occurred informally. In the

building trade, for example, the experiences of builders in Guadalajara were important; they had learnt how to use new tools and materials and how to organize space differently, and this knowledge was taken up in the town. Likewise, new methods have been introduced in agriculture in the care of animals and in other areas—and into a range of local activities.

Contrary to widespread belief, 'resistance to change' was not noticeable at this social level; rather there was great enthusiasm for new technology and innovations which would permit increases in productivity and efficiency. Such innovations were introduced where the necessary economic resources were available to the different productive units, and within the framework of the social relations of production which organized them. These latter were particularly important for domestic units of production, which tended to opt for the conservation of methods better adapted to conditions of scarce capital and an abundant supply of labour (González Chávez 1985). Moreover, in general, a high degree of creativity was evident in the adaptation of tools, substitution of materials, and the development of practices which would maximally exploit material and human resources. Among the peasantry, for example, in the five years between 1940 and 1945, iron ploughs almost entirely replaced those made of wood. Some producers continued to use wooden ploughs but this was because they were cheaper (they were produced locally by the peasants themselves), and because for certain tasks they were more effective owing to their greater weight. Iron tools used in the care of orchards were forged by local smiths. The use of fertilizers, improved seed, animal vaccines, and so on was widespread in common agricultural practice since it was clear to all that they increased efficiency. However, other practices which took advantage of natural resources without increased cost, such as animal dung, and herbal remedies for sick livestock, were also widely used (see González 1985 for a more detailed exposition of these themes).

Within this process of local economic transformation, the schools played a secondary rôle and responded in a very limited way to the demand for local skills and knowledge. Generally speaking, attendance at school increased (see Table 18.3) and this was partly a function of the necessity for better reading skills and improved arithmetical ability. These were *pragmatic requirements* created by greater integration with the national economy. Secondly, this increase was attributable to the greater significance attached to certificates of education in urban-industrial zones; given that agricultural modernization had created a reduction in the demand for labour in the locality, many were obliged to migrate to cities in search of work. This was a *formal requirement* which emerged from the development of the educational system itself. A survey of 200 families in the municipality (19.7% of the total families included in the census), revealed that those with a higher than average level of education had migrated out of the municipality, and in particular, that they had gone to urban centres with more than 100 000 inhabitants (see Table 18.4 and Fig. 18.2).

We can summarize the socio-economic effects of the development of formal education in the last 30 years as follows:

- (a) It has responded to pragmatic requirements by providing literacy courses and basic schooling to which the majority of the population has had access.

**Table 18.3** Enrolments per decade of two state primary schools in the town of Amacueca.

Year	Total	Boys	Girls
1900	183	79	104
1910	280	142	138
1920	223	102	121
1930	220	113	107
1940*	175	92	83
1950	341	165	176
1960†	535	275	260
1970‡	471	241	230

*Source:* archives of the two schools and of the State Office of Education.

\* The reduction in registered pupils in this decade is due to the opening of a Federal Mixed Primary School, which attracted pupils from both these two schools.

† Since the information for 1960 was incomplete, I took that for 1963.

‡ There is a reduction resulting from the opening of the sixth grade in the Federal school.

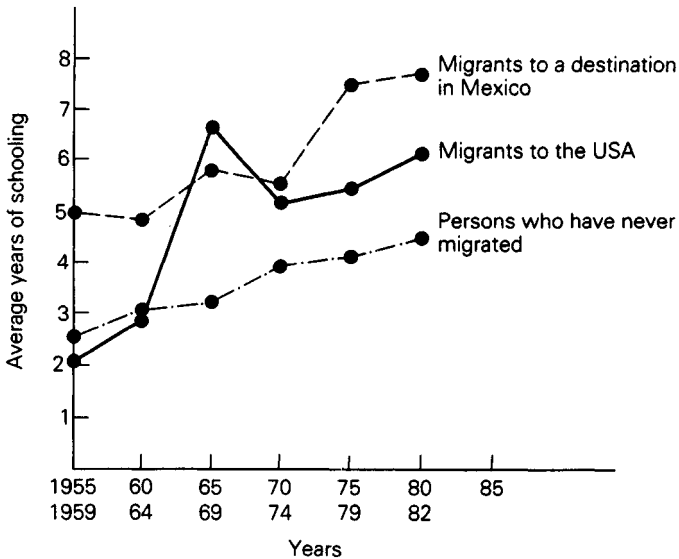
**Table 18.4** Size of the population centres receiving internal migrants

Number of inhabitants	Percentage of internal migrants
less than 5000	13.9
5000 to 20 000	10.8
20 000 to 100 000	13.6
100 000 to 1 million	11.8
more than 1 million	48.8
migrant destination unknown	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source:* statistical sample of 287 migrants.

- (b) It has responded to local demands for qualifications which would allow surplus labour to be incorporated into the urban labour market. This has, however, implied a transfer of human and material resources from rural to urban zones, principally those which have more than 1 million inhabitants, which are the destination point for 49% of migrants (see Table 18.4). Access to education, as was noted above, has been differential and has privileged groups with greater economic resources.
- (c) It has increased the demand for formal qualifications. This has meant that to obtain employment as clerks in commercial enterprises, in local tax offices, in the local (municipal) council or courts, there has been increased demand for certificates of secondary or technical education. Previously it had been sufficient for candidates to have completed the fourth or fifth levels of primary school. The requirement for higher levels of education contrasts with the very basic levels obtained by entrepreneurs, local government officers, and by head-teachers. These latter have often only recently registered for courses at teacher-training colleges in response to directives from the state-level Department of Education. Lastly, the demand for formal qualifications is also

**Figure 18.2** Average years of schooling among the population aged 15 and over in the period 1955–82, Municipality of Amacueca, Jalisco. (Source: Survey Data.)



in contrast with the low levels of education which are characteristic of those employed in the public sector, although in the contemporary period it was noted that the number of graduates and professionals was increasing in this sector.

- (d) It has promoted a devaluation of informal education in so far as it has not integrated local educational practices into its programme, nor has it recognized them as valid.

### Conclusions

Centralization of education was a historical process which resulted in the concentration of power in the federal state. In the course of this process education was defined as falling within the public domain, and passed into the hands of the state; this in turn meant that parents, along with municipal and state-level authorities, were marginalized from decision-making processes in the development of an official system of education. The centralization of education was carried out within a context of change, and the integration of the locality into the nation-state. This process of change undermined the range of action and decision of local socio-economic groups, and led to greater intervention in these spheres by the state, and by externally generated national and international capital.

However, the process of centralization was limited by forces which constrained interventions by the state, and defined the extent to which educational policies were successful. In the first place, the state was unable to satisfy demand for the education of a geographically disperse population with high levels of demographic growth. In the second place, the failure to respond to the problem of social and geographical inequalities was exacerbated through the privileging of determinate regions, certain sectors, and social strata, who were consequently the major beneficiaries of state investment in education. Lastly, the decision to unify and control school education meant that it was very difficult for the state to respond to a plurality of sociocultural structures and practices, or to incorporate the richness of these into the sphere of formal education through the participation of the various agents and institutions involved. The importance placed on unification and control also meant that the state educational system emerged as inefficient, and unable to respond to the demands for educational services—a matter of urgency given conditions of rapid change-articulated by different social groups.

A consideration of the situation from the point of view of the social groups, who were involved in the processes of social change in addition to the state, makes it clear that such groups were able to respond to developments in two ways: in the first place this was achieved by using formal education as a means to an end; either in order to obtain qualifications, or to learn some necessary skill. In this way educational resources provided by the state were adapted to the economic and social conditions of particular social groups. In the second place, those aspects of formal education which had become necessary to the socialization of the young were included as part of a total process of education, within which the knowledge and skills transmitted through informal practices also played a significant part. Furthermore, adults took advantage of the new possibilities to develop certain activities, and to incorporate innovations which might lead to an improved socio-economic position, or increased participation in contemporary processes of social change. Thus, incursions by the state into the field of education were received and incorporated through a structure of social relations and institutions which were controlled, and invested in, by determinate social groups. This latter was especially relevant to those groups and social sectors who were marginalized from the formal system, and to whom the formal system had little to offer.

The development of educational centralization, through which the state gained a monopoly of formal schooling, is therefore regarded as a contradictory historical process; in its attempt to unify and homogenize the nation the state accentuated social differentiation and heterogeneity. Moreover, this process has acted to limit the range of action and influence of the state in society, creating the political space for other forms of action and social institutions. While these may be disorganized, or govern more limited realms of power, they are autonomously controlled and define processes of social change.

Two propositions have emerged from the above, and although they require more detailed consideration, they are derived from the present analysis.

*A political choice?*

It is worth asking whether the limitations of the educational system are the result of inadequate economic resources, or whether they are the consequences of a political decision on the part of the state to institute a system of education which would gain it *direct*, though limited, control over the national educational process. This option would result in a system geared to the development of a power base, and a means of control in a context of increasing inequalities, inequalities themselves generated by contemporary national development in which the state plays a key rôle. Such a conception of education would come into direct contradiction with the official programme of the Mexican state, which proposes an educational system geared to the creation of a common base of knowledge, skills, and values.

*State authoritarianism*

The centralization of education in Mexico has assumed an *authoritarian* character manifested by the exclusion of private education and state and municipal authorities from participation in the education process, and by its monopolization of the system. This authoritarianism should be understood paradoxically—as a function of the weakness of the state, its failure to confront social inequalities, or to grasp the significance of sociocultural heterogeneity, and not as an indication of its strength. With respect to this latter point, it is worth citing Roberto Varela (1984, p. 45), who, in his work on the Mexican political system, has suggested that the state evolves authoritarian forms of government when it is unable to achieve independent power in an underdeveloped society ‘...whose active income is low and where income distribution is unbalanced’.

**Note**

- 1 A preliminary version of this chapter was presented to the Workshop on ‘Centralization and unequal exchange in Latin America’. University of Texas, Austin, April 1986.

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# Index

References in italics indicate figures.

- Acalan 102
- adaptation of societies 111
- Agrarian Law (Java), implications of 282
- agricultural systems
  - Hawaii 58
  - Java 281–9, 283–1, 285
  - Mexico 90–4, 91–5
  - Palestine 115
- ahupua'a system*, development 58
- Alashiya* 147
- alliances, Mayan
  - formation from lineages 102–6
  - successive tripartite tiers 105–9;
  - breakdown 106
- alphabetical writing 253
- ancestor worship 50
- Ancestral Polynesian Society 55, 64
- annals
  - Inca 180
  - Scottish 236–5
- Asiatic mode of production (AMP) 275–3
- Aztec early writing system 7
  
- Bajío region 298–5
- Bali 273, 277
- Bamun syllabary 262–72
- Benin, emergence of 118–34
- Bete syllabary 262
- Bikini 34–8
- burcaucracy, in South-East Asia 276–4
- burial stones, Pictish 219, 220–9
  
- Cakchiquel 103, 104, 105, 106
- centralization 5–6
  
- Egypt 188, 195, 199, 201
- Hispanic America 301, 310–18
- Marshall Islands 33, 36–37
- of education (Mexico) 314–41
- Teotihuacan 92–7
- ceramics trade (Cyprus) 149, 157, 158
- certificates of education (Mexico) 320, 331, 331–9
- Chiapas 299
- chiefdom
  - Ancestral Polynesian Society 55, 64
  - compared to early state 47
  - Hawaii 56, 60, 64–8, 66
  - Marshall Islands 31, 33, 34–37
  - to state 8–9, 10–14, 78
- China 18
- Chola kingdom 278
- Christianity
  - missionaries and writing 252
  - Picts and 214–2, 242–50
- Chuckchee syllabary 255–3
- Chujuyup 104
- churches
  - lordship patronage 140–5
  - opposition to tax reforms (Mexico) 306
  - organization of Scottish 214–2
  - Pictish stones 225, 224
  - power in Dalriada 233–3
  - role in education (Mexico) 319–6
- climate hypothesis (Palestine) 112–16
- coconuts, role of (Marshall Islands) 36–37
- Columbus, Christopher 245
- communal mode of production 77–6
- compass 245, 266

- confederations, formation of (Maya) 102
- copper
  - in Cyprus 150–61
  - in Egypt 200
- counters
  - early form of writing 175–1, 179
- Cree syllabary 254–2
- Cristiada* 310–17
- cultivation system (Java) 281–9, 283–1, 285
- cuneiform writing system 173
- Cyprus 145–51
  - archeological background 148–3
  - economic aspects 150–6
  - social organization 153–63
- Dalriada
  - literacy and power in 229–50
- decentralization
  - Hispanic-America 305–12
  - Palestine 110–18
- defensible earth works (England) 133–8
- deforestation
  - Hawaii 58
  - Palestine 113
- Denmark 222
- descent groups, ramified (Safata) 45–47
- despotism, oriental 275
- deudalism 79
- Djuka syllabary 261–9
- Duala syllabary 260–8
- economic records, early written 177–3, 180, 183
- Edo languages, study of 119–3
- education
  - centralization in Mexico 314–41
  - of commoners 172
- Egypt
  - trade with Palestine 114–18
  - writing and social organization 186–4, 198–8
  - early 174, 188–9
  - third and fourth dynasties 193–197
  - fifth and sixth dynastics 197–4
- Ekpoma 8.8
- elite class
  - in Cyprus 150–4, 154–8, 155
  - in Egypt 190–9
  - in Java 283
  - see also* status symbols
- encomienda* system 301
- Enewetak 37–1
- England, medieval 133–137
  - lordships 138–6
- Equiano, O. 245–4
- Europe 17–21
  - colonialism 18–1
  - see also* England, medieval; Hispanic-America; Netherlands
- Evans syllabary 254–2
- evolution
  - example of down ward (Safata) 40–50
  - to define societies 1–2
  - upward 48
- family
  - role in Medieval England 137
  - role of ceremonial (Safata) 45–9
- feudalism 76–77
  - and Classic Indic states 276
  - in Medieval England 133–46
- figureheads, ceremonial (Safata) 43
- fish pond construction (Hawaii) 58–2
- formation of states 3–6, 75–77
  - archaeological perspectives 21–7
  - from chiefdom 8–9, 10–14, 78
  - modes of production 77–6
  - Picts 211–22
  - Safata as early 47–1
- Friedman and Rowlands model 63–7
- gangsterism 67
- Geertz model 273, 277
- genealogical records (Dalriada) 238–6
- Germanic mode of production 78–3, 81
- Giza, pyramids at 194, 195, 196
- Goody, J., views of 170–7
- haciendas 301, 303
  - Guaracha 304, 311
- Hawaii 54–8
  - cultural sequence 55–61
  - interpretation of sequence 61–7

- revised model 64–68
- hero-deities worship (Nigeria) 131
- hieroglyphs (Maya) 100, 102
- Hispanic-America
  - class and state of post-conquest 301–15
  - conquest 295–6
  - resistance to capitalism and centralization 310–18
- Hommon model 61–5
- household-based model of production 78–2
- human sacrifice temples (Hawaii) 60
- hydraulic society 48
  - and Classic Indic states 275
  - Valley of Mexico 87–97
- Inca society 7, 16
- infanticide 34–7
- invasion hypothesis (Palestine) 111–15
- inventions, role in society 2
- involution, example of (Safata) 40–50
- Iona, monastery at 232
- Ireland, immigration from 232
- irrigation
  - importance in Valley of Mexico 91, 94
- Japan 286
- Java
  - colonial 279–95
  - pre-colonial 273–1, 276, 279–7
- jewellery, Pictish 219–7
- Kauder syllabary 261
- Kirch model 61, 62
- Kotzebue, O. von 34–7
- Kpelle syllabary 261
- land 14–15
  - native rights to (Java) 280, 282
  - purchase in Peru 303, 304–11
  - rights on Marshall Islands 31, 34, 35, 36
  - taxation of in Mexico 306
- languages exploitation of Latin (Dalriada) 233, 240
  - studies on Edo group 119–3
- Latin, use of (Dalriada) 233, 240
- liberalism (Mexico) 305–12
- lineage mode of production 80–6
- Loma syllabary 261
- lordships 135–9, 138–6
- Majapahit 273–1
- Mann, M., theories 2–3, 9
- marriage
  - role in lineage mode of production 81–5
- Marshall Islands
  - Enewetak 37–1
  - heirarchy 31, 33, 34–37
- Marx, K.
  - Asiatic mode of production model 275–3
- mass burial systems (Cyprus) 149
- Maya
  - chontal migration 102
  - control of provinces 106–10
  - economics and ethnohistory 100–4
  - segmentary lineage organization 102–8
  - tripartite tiers 105–9
- Mende syllabary 261
- Mesopotamia 114
  - writings 173–88, 188, 189
- Mexico, Valley of
  - agricultural centres 90–4
  - development of cities 91–5
  - primitive ancestors 89–3
  - reconcentration 95–9
  - rise of imperial state 92–7
  - Spanish colonialism 307–15
  - Toltec expansion 94–8, 105
- migration
  - from Ireland to Dalriada 232
  - in Maya 102, 103
  - internal Mexican 322, 331–8
  - short-distance (Nigeria) 124
  - Tahiti and Hawaii 57, 61, 65
  - to USA from Mexico 322
- mills, control of (England) 140
- modernity of states, defined xxi–1
- modes of production 75–8
  - Asiatic 275–3
  - communal 77–6
  - Germanic 78–3, 81
  - lineage 80–6
- motte-and-bailey 133–8
- movement restrictions, internal 285

- Neck syllabary 256–4
- Netherlands
  - colonial policies 283
  - role in Java 279–7, 281–9, 283–2
- occasional ceremonial hierarchy 40–50
- Okhunwun 124, 125, 128, 8.6
- Palestine
  - Early Bronze 110
  - exploitation for transition 111–18
  - Intermediate Bronze 110
- papyrus 189–6, 194
- paramount chiefs
  - first Hawaiian 59
  - Marshall Islands 31, 33, 34–37
- pastoral nomadism (Palestine) 115
- patrimonialism-prebendalism (Java)
  - colonial 279–95
  - pre-colonial 273–1, 279–7
- peripheralization
  - defined 283
  - in Java 283–2
- Peru 7, 16, 298
  - early writing system 180–6
  - land purchase 303, 304–11
  - revolt against tribute system 300
- Picts 183
  - and Christianity 214–2, 242–50
  - historical synopsis 208–18
  - state formation 211–22
  - symbol stones and symbolism 215–33
- ports, trading
  - ‘free’ (Eastern Mediterranean) 152–6
  - in Maya 102
- pottery
  - Egyptian 189, 200
  - sherd analysis (Nigeria) 120–4
  - use in rituals 236
  - wheel-thrown 236
- printing, importance of 171
- private education (Mexico) 323
- pyramids, Egyptian 190, 191–8, 193–197
  - settlement structure 103–7
- quipus 180–6
- Quito region 12–13, 16
- Rabinal 105, 106
- religion 154
  - ancestor worship 50
  - human sacrifice temples 60
  - Picts 214–2
  - Tahitian influence (Hawaii) 57, 66
  - writing and 193, 232–40, 252
- repartimientos* 302
- revitalization movement, defined 215
- rituals 154, 233, 236
- Roman influence (Picts) 208–16
- Sacapultec 106
- Safata 40–4, 48–3
  - as an early state 47–1
  - Safata (contd.)
    - hierarchy 41–47
- Scotland, early
  - literacy and power in 229–50
  - see also* Picts
- sealings, role of 175, 180–4
- segmentary lineage organization
  - Classic Indic states 277–6
  - Maya 102–8
- sequential hierarchy 40
  - Botswana 41
  - Safata 40–50
- Sequoyah syllabary 257–7
- servile labour (Java) 280–9
- simultaneous hierarchy, defined 40, 41
- Skocpol, T., criticism of 15–16
- slave-based states 77, 79
- social organization hypothesis (Palestine)
  - 113–18
- Spain
  - role in Americas 295–18
  - social organization 297–4
- state, defined xxi
- status symbols
  - brooches (Dalriada) 242
  - church patronage (England) 140–5
  - cloth (Inca) 7
  - copper (Cyprus) 154–8

- sealings (Urak) 175, 178–4
  - symbols and stones (Picts) 212, 214, 215, 217–7, 73.2
  - writing (Egypt) 192, 198–6
- stratification, social 6–8
  - and the state of 14–17
  - developed in Mexico 96
  - Egyptian 190–9, 195–2
  - Hawaiian 66–68
  - Hispanic-American 298–13
  - Javan 283–1
  - Marshall Islands 36
  - of surrounding societies 83
  - on Urak tablets 177
  - Palestinian 113–18
  - Pictish 214, 215
  - related to copper (Cyprus) 154–61
- strong-tribute based states 76, 79, 81, 4.2
- subsistence resources
  - in state formation 14
- surveys, civil
  - Dalriada 239–7
  - Urak 178
- syllabaries 254–72
- tablets, Uruk 176–3, 181–7, 183
- Tahiti
  - role in Hawaiian history 57, 61, 65
- Tenevil syllabary 255–3
- Tenochtitlan 95
- Teotihuacan 92–7
- theatre state model 273, 277
- tombs
  - Cyprus 149
  - Egypt 190, 191–8, 193–197
  - stone writing in Dalriada 240–8
- Tonga 49
- trade
  - ceramics (Cyprus) 149, 157, 158
  - copper (Cyprus) 157–1
  - importance to Palestine 114–18
  - ports 102, 152–6
- tributes and tribute-based states 75, 76–77
  - Hawaii 60
  - Hispanic-America 302
  - Java 281
  - Marshall Islands 31, 33
  - Tula 94
- Udo 128, 8.7
- uneven development, defined 75
- Urak 173–88
- urbanization
  - and level of education (Mexico) 326–3
  - development in Mexico 91, 92–7
  - in Early Bronze (Java) 113 role of writing 169–4, 179–5
- Vai syllabary 260–8
- warfare
  - Hawaiian expansion via 59–3
  - role in state formation 11–12
- weak tribute-based states 76, 80, 82–6
- Weber model 9–10, 273–1, 276, 279–7
- women, authority of 81, 82
- writing 149
  - Aztec early system 7
  - development of systems 252–72
  - hieroglyphs (Maya) 100, 102
  - in Egypt 186–202
  - knowledge and power 250–9
  - logic of 178–7
  - Mesopotamian 173–88, 188, 189
  - role 169–8, 182–8
  - technology and magic 245–6